



A
JERSEY
BOY
IN THE
REVOLUTION


EVERETT T. TOMLINSON

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A JERSEY BOY IN THE REVOLUTION

BY

EVERETT T. TOMLINSON

AUTHOR OF "THE BOYS OF OLD MONMOUTH" "TECUMSEH'S YOUNG
BRAVES," "TWO YOUNG PATRIOTS" "WARD HILL
THE SENIOR" ETC., ETC.



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TO
A JERSEY BOY OF TO-DAY
HOWARD CARTER DAVIS



PREFACE

THIS story is founded upon the lives and deeds of some of the humbler heroes of the American Revolution. For the most part, the incidents and adventures interwoven in the tale are strictly true, and have been taken from the early records. The author has attempted, at least, to portray the perils and efforts of these forgotten men and women to protect themselves and their homes not only against an invading army, but also against the lawless men who were quick to take advantage of the contest for their own gain, and whose evil deeds were frequently ascribed by each of the contending armies to the other.

From this latter class no States in the Union suffered more than did New Jersey and South Carolina. The sturdy heroism of the humble people is often ignored in our histories; but it is as much a part of our

national inheritance as was the bravery in the open field. Indeed, the lives of the noble people, their fidelity and determination, their patience and faith, are all the most valuable portions of our heritage to-day. No monuments may have been erected to their memory, but they are none the less among the "unseen things which are eternal."

This tale has therefore been written in the modest hope that it may stimulate the boys and girls of the present generation to learn more concerning the principles for which their fathers contended, and that they may not consider them least among the possessions which are now their own.

"The greatest gift a hero leaves his race
Is to have been a hero. Say we fail! —
We feed the high traditions of the world
And leave our spirit in our children's breasts."

EVERETT T. TOMLINSON.

ELIZABETH, NEW JERSEY.

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A JERSEY BOY IN THE REVOLUTION

CHAPTER I

A STRANGE STRANGER

THE road which led to Shrewsbury for the most part was through a tangled brush, and with tall pine-trees and chestnuts along its borders. Occasionally some fertile farm lands could be seen, and here and there a quaint dwelling-house appeared; but these were the exception and not the rule, for in 1778 Old Monmouth County, New Jersey, was still a sparsely settled region. It is true the county was called "Old" Monmouth even in those days, and compared with certain other parts of the colonies, or "states," as they were then termed by some, there were many more people dwelling within its borders than rival counties could boast; but the evidences of newness were not wanting even in "Old" Monmouth.

In the road itself were the stumps of trees

which had been felled to open up a highway, and the deep ruts and rough places which abounded all proclaimed the lack of travel as well as of care. The September leaves, parched and sere from the intense heat of the preceding summer, were already falling, and as a gust of wind whirled them about for a moment before they dropped upon the highway, they served to increase the impression of loneliness and desolation. Squirrels were darting about in the woods in quest of their store of nuts for the winter days which soon would come, and the little gray "cottontails," as the Jersey people call the rabbits, appeared to feel no more alarm at being seen in the road than in the depths of the forests. A call of some bird occasionally broke in upon the stillness, but the quiet of the September day was only rendered the more intense by the plaintive cry.

Suddenly the squirrels for a moment abandoned their search and the little gray cottontails sat erect and listened intently. A sound not unknown had been heard, and instantly every denizen of the woods was alert, for the approach of a man was something they had already learned to fear. Soon the cause of the commotion appeared, when trudging along

the rough roadway came a well-grown lad who evidently was familiar with the locality, and who walked sturdily on, alike unmindful of the curious glances of the saucy little squirrels and of the half-challenging attitude of the cottontails, which, ready to dart into the woods at the first sign of danger, still hesitated and lingered, and with ears erect watched the approach of the stranger.

Tom Coward, however, was too much troubled to heed the presence of the little dwellers in the forest. He swung the club he carried in his hands, and glancing neither to the right nor to the left, walked steadily forward as unmindful of the quick resumption of labor behind him as he had been of its cessation when he approached, for his heart was troubled over graver problems than cottontails or squirrels could present.

In all the eighteen summers of his young life not one had been so tragic as that which had just passed. The advance of the British into old Monmouth and the terrible battle which had taken place only three months before this time had taught him more of the horrors of war and of the suffering which follows it than he had ever thought possible before.

Tom had had a part in that great battle. It was only a small part, it was true, but even to serve as a guide for some of the forces on that hot June morning had enabled him to learn from the inside what a desperate conflict between men of kindred races was like. For days the cries of the wounded, the groans of the dying, the sight of maimed and bleeding men, clad in coats of scarlet or of buff, had not departed from him. In the night sometimes he would start from his sleep with a cry which roused his bedfellow, Peter Van Mater, and it would require all his efforts to calm himself and once more resume his place beside his friend. The glory and the glamour of war were gone forever. Since the battle Tom had remained at the home of his foster father, Benzeor Osburn ; and although the reasons which influenced him to do so have been recorded in another book,¹ it may be wise to recount them briefly for the sake of the readers of the present story.

Years before this time, so far away, in fact, that the events had faded from Tom's mind, in one of the numerous gales which sweep over the Jersey shore, a noble schooner had been wrecked off the Monmouth coast. The

¹ *The Boys of Old Monmouth.*

country people had assembled on the beach and watched the vessel struggling in the storm, until at last, driven on by compassion for the unfortunate people on board, a half dozen men had manned a whale-boat and set forth over the tossing sea to their aid. Before the luckless schooner could be gained she had foundered and disappeared beneath the waters, and the horror-stricken men who had gone to her relief at once began to search for the bodies of those who had cast themselves into the waves.

The only ones they had discovered were those of a woman and little child, fast bound to a floating bale of cotton; but when they were brought ashore it was speedily found that only the child was living. The body of the dead mother was afterwards buried in the near-by churchyard and her child was "bound out" to Benzeor Osburn, a farmer in Old Monmouth.

Tom Coward had heard the story many times and knew that he was the waif who had been rescued in the storm. The name Coward had been found upon his clothing, but in all the years not a word had been heard which would indicate who or what he was.

In Benzeor Osburn's home he had been

brought up much as the other country boys of the region had been. Benzeor had not been unkind to him, but the family was large and the demands many, so Tom had neither expected nor received any special favors. He had toiled in the fields and shared the privations without a murmur, well aware that his lot was not unlike that of many of the Monmouth lads. For Benzeor Osburn he had cherished no special feelings of any kind, looking upon him as his lawful master until that longed-for time should come when he would be twenty-one years of age and free to labor for himself. For Mistress Osburn, the worn and spiritless little mother of the large family, Tom's feeling was one of pity; but for Sarah, the oldest of the children, a girl of his own age, he had a strong liking. Sarah's energy and decision, her undaunted courage and gentleness had made her the stay of the family, and to the bound boy she was almost like a true sister.

The adjoining farm had been owned by the Van Maters, and there Tom had passed many of the infrequent holidays which came to him, for he and the eldest of the Van Mater boys were fast friends. Together they trapped and fished, and each shared with the other

his hopes and plans for the future. Tom's friend was familiarly known as Little Peter, to distinguish him from his father who bore the same name. It is true that "Little" Peter towered now more than a head above his father, but the appellation bestowed in childhood still continued. The Van Maters had been patriots of the most ardent kind, and at the breaking out of hostilities Peter, the father, had been among the first to enlist, and the son had been left as the main support of the mother and the five children. It is needless to say that the sentiments of the father were also those of the son; and Tom Coward, not to be behind in faithfulness, was as loyal as his friend. Many were the times when they planned to enter the army and share in the stirring experiences of the times; but neither could leave home, and so their visions and dreams bade fair to be unfulfilled.

Unexpectedly, and in a manner which Old Monmouth never forgot, both boys were drawn into service, and the life they had known was gone forever; and the way of it was as follows. When trouble had first arisen between the colonies and the mother country, Benzeor Osburn had been among the loudest in his apparent devotion to the American

cause, for he had ever been one to oppose taxation of any kind. When, however, the war had followed, and something more than protests were required, Benzeor's patriotism had weakened, and gradually his affections were transferred, though they were not bestowed upon King George and his soldiers.

In Old Monmouth, as the war progressed, bands of reckless and evil men had been formed, who were quick to take advantage of the prevailing struggle for their own profit. From their headquarters among the pines in the lower part of the county, they sallied forth to make attacks upon the scattered homes, and always left a trail of suffering and loss behind them. As many of the brave Monmouth men were then in Washington's army, there were few left to protect the women and children from the "pine robbers," as the outlaws were called, and as a natural consequence the boldness of the bands and the fear of the people increased.

Benzeor Osburn had been drawn to these evil men. Their gains and immunity from punishment had appealed so strongly to his avaricious mind that at last he had virtually become one of them, though he fancied that none of his neighbors was aware of his deeds.

Tom Coward, hearing strange voices in the house at night and suspicious of the frequent absences of his foster father from home, had become convinced that Benzeor was playing a double part, but he was in no wise prepared for the revelation which came one never-to-be-forgotten night.

It was a night when Peter Van Mater was expected for a visit in his home, he having obtained permission to leave the advancing army for a brief time ; but somehow the pine robbers had learned of his plan and acted accordingly. Arriving at the place a half hour before the coming of the soldier, they had demanded of Mistress Van Mater the money which they declared was concealed somewhere about the house. The sturdy woman had refused to give up her possessions, and in the turmoil which followed she had been shot by the outlaws, and her husband, upon his arrival, had been seized and carried away for the reward which was offered for every captured continental. And Tom Coward in his heart had been convinced that Benzeor Osburn had been one of those who had made the attack upon the Van Mater household.

The alarm and horror which followed the deed were almost indescribable. Little Peter

had left the children in the care of the neighbors and gone to search for his father. Tom had resolved to leave Benzeor's house and carry out the project he long had cherished, of joining the approaching army of Washington. Not even to Sarah did he breathe his suspicion of her father; but as Benzeor had at once departed from the region, perhaps there was slight need of that, after all.

On his way to the army Tom had fallen in with young Lieutenant Gordon, a Monmouth boy, whom General Maxwell had sent to mark the places where bridges were to be found in front of the advancing British army. As they journeyed on together, the lieutenant had described to Tom his experiences, dwelling particularly upon the sights he had seen in Philadelphia, where, he casually informed his friend, he had heard of a Colonel Coward among the British forces there.

Tom had remained with the army for a time, serving as guide in the region familiar to him; but after the terrible battle of Monmouth, by a strange course of events he had been brought back to Benzeor's house, and to his surprise discovered that Little Peter and his younger brothers and sisters were also there. A quiet word from Sarah had in-

formed him of her suspicions of her father, and Tom quickly understood that the true-hearted girl was eager to provide a home for those whom Benzeor had helped to make homeless.

In response to her appeal, both Tom and Little Peter had remained upon the place until the time of the opening of this story. The scanty crops had now been gathered and the pressing problem of the immediate future must be faced.

Tom's thoughts had gone back again and again to the words of Lieutenant Gordon concerning the Colonel Coward he had heard of in the British troops. The lad's own homeless condition had led him to dwell upon the information more and more. When he had been husking the corn or digging potatoes in the field, he had been thinking of the problem, until at last his longing to know something more concerning himself had become intense. Who was he? Where had his home been? Had he brothers and sisters? The very thought of such a possibility was sufficient to send the blood bounding through the lad's veins; but the reaction would come when he thought of his own helplessness. What could he ever do to find out the truth?

Not even to Little Peter had Tom told his thoughts, but the longing had become steadily stronger ; and at last unable to rest without making some effort to learn more, he had resolved to go to the home of Mr. Edwards in Shrewsbury and relate all the story to him, and seek his advice and aid.

It was true that Mr. Edwards was one of the staunchest loyalists in Old Monmouth. His son Stephen Edwards was in the British army in New York, and the father had never feared to declare his allegiance to the British king. Differing, however, from many of his Tory neighbors, he had been calm and dignified in the midst of the prevailing excitement, and even the confiscation of his property and threats against his life had not availed to induce him to enter into the controversy or the struggle.

Tom Coward had not lost any of his devotion for the cause of the colonies ; but as he had a slight acquaintance with Mr. Edwards, and as he also had a feeling of respect for him, in spite of the man's well-known Tory sympathies, he had resolved to go to him and tell him all he knew, which was but little, and all he desired to know, which was much more.

The secret hope in Tom's heart was that

the son Stephen, whose wife was staying in the Edwards home while her husband was absent in the army, might be induced to make some inquiries in the city, and if he should by any chance meet the mystical Colonel Coward, he could very easily ascertain whether the officer had ever heard of any of his immediate family being lost off the Jersey shore in a storm a dozen or more years ago.

It was with some such thoughts in his mind, then, that Tom Coward was trudging along the rough road to Shrewsbury, and as the September sun began to sink lower in the western sky, he knew that the end of his journey now could not be far distant. Two miles more and he must be near the place in which Mr. Edwards was living.

The lad had been walking since noon, for horses were scarce in Monmouth after the battle; but Tom had not cared for the distance, and even expected to return that very night after his visit had been accomplished.

The moon would be near the full, and while prowling pine robbers would doubtless be out on their missions of woe, Tom had slight fear of them himself. If any of them should be discovered, it would be an easy matter to dart into the near-by woods

and wait for them to depart. If the worst came to pass, he was unarmed and had nothing about him worth the taking. The worst he had to expect was a brutal kick or a blow on the head, and for such little things as that Tom had slight fear. At all events, they were secondary considerations; and in the eagerness which came now with the thought that the long desired visit was at last about to be made, the lad quickened his pace and was about to run, when he suddenly stopped as he discovered some one in the road in advance of him and evidently going in the same direction.

Tom's first impulse was to turn about, but as he peered keenly ahead his fears were in a measure allayed when he discovered that the stranger was a woman. It was unusual that so near nightfall a woman should be on the road and alone. She must be a newcomer or she would never have dared to enter that lonely road unaccompanied. It might be some one he knew, and at the thought Tom stopped again and shouted: "Hello! Hello! Wait a minute and I'll catch up with you!"

The effect of his call was not what he expected, for giving one startled glance behind

her the woman appeared to hesitate for a moment and then acted as if she were about to dart into the woods by the roadside.

"Hold on ! Hold on !" called Tom. "I'm all alone. Wait for me !"

Apparently concluding that escape was impossible and that the stranger had spoken truly, the woman halted and Tom began to run toward her. As he approached he noted that she wore a long sunbonnet which almost concealed her face, but what impressed him far more than the bonnet or the dress was the fact that he had never before seen a woman with such broad shoulders. She certainly was a stranger, and Tom felt somewhat abashed as he joined her. He had not been able to see her face, and for some reason it was kept turned away from him, though whether from modesty or fear Tom could not determine.

"I beg your pardon, madam," he began ; "I saw that you were alone and I did not know but it might be a neighbor, so I called. Do you prefer to have me go on alone ?"

"It matters not," replied the woman ; "I go but a short distance, I thank you."

Tom glanced up quickly as she spoke. Surely no woman before ever possessed such

a voice as that. At least he had never heard the like from any of his feminine acquaintances. As he looked down at the ground his confusion was increased when he discovered that his companion was wearing the heavy boots such as the soldier had. What could it mean? Who was this strange being by his side?

He was silent for a moment and then said, "I also go but a short distance up the road. Know you where Mr. Edwards lives?"

The question seemed to arouse a strange excitement in his companion. For a moment she stopped, and Tom thought she was about to turn and run back in the road. More and more puzzled, the lad began to apologize, although he could not understand why such a simple question could produce such an excitement, when the woman turned and tremblingly faced him.

The low beams of the afternoon sun fell full upon her face, and Tom could not repress the exclamation that rose to his lips.

"It is you, Tom Coward, I see," said the woman. "Do you know me?"

"I—I—I—think I do," faltered Tom, "I—I—think so."

"You are not positive though, are you?"

You do not feel so sure, that you will feel called upon to refer to it to any one?"

Tom hesitated. There was a conflict between pity and blame, anger and sympathy going on in his heart.

"I am hoping you will not feel it too much, just simply to refrain from mentioning our meeting in the hearing of others," she repeated.

"Suppose some one asks me?" inquired Tom nervously, for he had just obtained a glimpse of the barrel of a pistol in the hands of the woman.

"No one will ask you," responded the stranger quickly, "or if any one should, all you need to reply is that you met a strange woman in the road. Do you hear me, Tom Coward?"

"Yes, I hear you. I have met a strange woman truly."

"Mark me then! If you are going to Mr. Edwards's, then understand me, I *am not*. You hear me, I take it?"

"Yes."

"And what may be your errand at Mr. Edwards's, if I make bold to inquire?"

"I wish to send a message to his son."

"And where is his son? Stephen Edwards, I fancy you mean?"

"Yes, Stephen. Stephen — is in New York," said Tom at last.

"Yes, Stephen Edwards *is* in New York. Is it necessary for you to see his father?"

"I wish to see him on a matter of importance. It concerns no one but myself," he hastily added, "and has to do only with myself, except that his son Stephen, who is in New York, may be able to aid me."

"His son Stephen, who is in New York, can aid you in any reasonable matter. I know whereof I speak, for out of my own experience I have learned that he appreciates a friend. Go now."

Thus bidden Tom turned and hastened along the road toward the house of Mr. Edwards, which was distant about a quarter of a mile. Only once did he glance behind him, and then he perceived that his recent companion had disappeared from sight.

Troubled and perplexed far more than he could express, Tom soon after entered the lane which led to the house Mr. Edwards then was occupying with his family, and in response to his knock the door was opened by the very man whom he had come to see.

CHAPTER II

AN AGITATED TORY

It was at once evident to Tom that Mr. Edwards was agitated and excited. His customary calmness was sadly wanting, and the lad in the recollection of his recent meeting with the strange woman in the road had no difficulty in understanding the cause of the man's uneasiness. The expression of relief which came over Mr. Edwards's face when he recognized his visitor was so marked that Tom felt his heart go out in sympathy to the old man in spite of his well-known adherence to the cause of the British king.

"Come in, Thomas," said Mr. Edwards, his voice trembling in spite of his efforts to control it. "You are far from home. Have you had any supper?"

"Yes," replied Tom, as he accepted the invitation to enter and seated himself in the kitchen. "I brought something to eat with me."

"Is everything safe at Benzeor's? Per-

haps I ought not to ask the question, for no one and no place is safe in these godless times."

"Everything was all right when I left and probably is now, for as you know there are special reasons why Benzeor's place is not likely to be attacked."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Edwards hastily. "I know, I know. But no one is safe now, and every day brings a darker view than the day before it." As he spoke the old man rose from his seat and, approaching the door, listened for a moment, and then returned to the room. "I am living in a constant state of fear," he explained, "and you must not heed my actions. What brings you here, Thomas?"

"Mr. Edwards," began Tom abruptly, coming at once to the purpose of his visit, "you knew I am Benzeor's bound boy, didn't you? You know how I came there? You've heard the story of the wreck when my mother was drowned?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Edwards gently. "I was in the crowd on the beach at the time. 'T was a fearful gale, Thomas, and it was almost a miracle that you were saved. Not another soul came ashore that day."

“So I have heard. I have been thinking all summer of that wreck and of my poor drowned mother who is buried in the graveyard over by the church. Last summer Lieutenant Gordon told me that he had heard of an officer in the British army named Colonel Coward. Now I don’t know whether he is any of my family or not, but I’ve been thinking of him all summer and wondering whether I could n’t find out more about him. Sometimes it seems to me I just must drop everything and find that man.”

“Why do you come to me with your story, Thomas? Did you fancy I would be able to assist you?” Mr. Edwards smiled somewhat bitterly as he spoke.

“I know you don’t think as a good many of the people in Old Monmouth do about the war, but I did n’t know but Stephen might be able to learn something about that Colonel Coward and report to you. Stephen is in New York, is n’t he?”

“Yes, yes, Stephen is in New York,” said Mr. Edwards hastily. “If ever I might be able to see him or get word to him, it is possible that he might know or find out something about the man. Hark! What was that?”

The dusk was deepening, and Tom could not see the expression upon the old man's face. However, he had heard a door opened in the adjoining room and the sound of voices in a low conversation. Surely he recognized one of the voices, and it had not been long since he had heard it in the road over which he had come that very afternoon. It was not strange that Mr. Edwards should be agitated, and in spite of his lack of sympathy for his host's Tory principles, he could feel for him in other ways.

Mr. Edwards departed from the room, and his voice also could be heard in the other room. Concluding that the time had come for him to go home, now that he had delivered his message and that he was likely to hear or learn more than he cared to know at that time, Tom rose and remained standing in the room.

His first impulse was to depart at once and without bidding Mr. Edwards good-night, but he wished to thank the old man for his implied willingness to aid him, and besides he was fearful that his departure would be misunderstood. Accordingly he waited, though he still could hear the low voices in the adjoining room, and the sound only served to

increase his own feeling of uneasiness and alarm.

Just at that time Mr. Edwards reëntered the room, and taking a long splinter from the bundle which was hanging near the fireplace, thrust it into the fire and prepared to light a candle.

"I'm going now, Mr. Edwards," said Tom quickly. "I thank you for your kindness, and if you can get word to Stephen and he is willing to make a few inquiries concerning Colonel Coward, I shall be very grateful. It means more to me than you can know."

"Nay, nay, Thomas. Do not go yet. I beg of you to remain. As I was saying, I feel very confident that I can get word to my son and he will aid you, I am positive he will. Be pleased to be seated again."

Tom could see by the light of the candle that Mr. Edwards' face was ghastly and that his hands were trembling as with an ague. Stirred by a feeling of pity for the old man, Tom obeyed, and again took the seat. He could not understand why Mr. Edwards should be so eager for him to remain, but it was evident that he was, and the lad could not refuse.

"Yes, I think I can get word to my boy,"

began Mr. Edwards once more. "He is a fine lad, is Stephen. You know him, do you not, Thomas?"

"I—I—have seen him," stammered Tom.

"You would not know him now, I am sure. Even his wife, who is staying with us while he is in the army, can see great changes in him whenever she goes to New York. It has been long since she has seen him, and no one knows how long it will be before she will see him again. These are terrible times, Thomas, terrible times."

"Yes, everything grows worse and worse since the battle," said Tom. "The pine robbers and refugees and the Tories are worse and worse. If the war does n't end soon, there won't be much left in Old Monmouth."

"The war must end soon. For three years now it has gone on, and these insolent rebels can't hold out much longer."

"The French will help us," replied Tom sturdily; for in spite of his desire to learn more about the mysterious colonel who bore the same name as his own, he was not inclined to abate his devotion to the cause of the struggling people.

"The Frenchmen!" said Mr. Edwards bitterly. "They have great cause to inter-

fere in this quarrel. They would simply make a cat's-paw of these misguided rebels and seek to regain some of the territory the redcoats took away from them."

"They have n't done very much as yet," replied Tom, forgetting for the moment how inconsistent the words were with his own previous statement. "Their heaviest vessels could n't get into the harbor at New York."

"Yes, I know, but they sailed away for Newport."

"They had to. There was n't any other place the British held," said Tom boldly. "General Greene and Lafayette and Sullivan have gone to help too, I hear."

"Aye, they have gone, too. And meanwhile what is to become of Old Monmouth? It is friend against friend, neighbor against neighbor. No man's life is safe, and as for his property, I fancy I know a little of what these rascally rebels do with that," added the old man bitterly. "I tell you, Thomas, justice will yet be done. Those of us who have loved old England and her king, and have hoped to live and die under her rule, whether it was on one side of the great ocean or the other, shall yet live to see this accursed rebellion of poverty-stricken wretches, who do not

even own a roof over their heads and who try to upset all forms of law and drive out law-abiding people from their own, put to an end."

"And meanwhile they're to sit calmly down and thank his gracious majesty King George III. for the privilege of supporting his court in luxury and never to have a word to say about it? I suppose they're even to thank the king for sending the Dutch butchers over here, too? Stamp Act and tea tax and Dutch butchers!"

Tom's excitement was increasing, and the fire of his young manhood was beginning to burn, so that for the moment even the object of his visit and the disturbing sounds of those voices heard in the adjoining room were forgotten. The burning question of all questions at that time could not be even lightly touched upon without rousing the passions of the people.

"The rebels for the most part have not been the ones to pay the taxes," said Mr. Edwards quietly. "The loyalists paid those, and if they did not complain, I do not see why these poor rebels, the most of them without a shilling to their names or a roof to cover their heads, should make such an ado

about it. I was born in England. I love England. I came here because it was an English colony, and now I do not see why I should be deprived of my possessions and my privileges, to satisfy the desires of a rebel. Ah! Thomas, you are yet a young man, and have been carried away by the heat of the times. You will yet live to see the justice of my words. At all events, there are many good people in Old Monmouth of my very way of thinking."

"Yes, there are lots of them," said Tom bitterly. "If it was n't for them, such gangs as the pine robbers would n't go prowling around. Such visits as the 'Greens' made when they burned all those houses up near Middletown would n't be made. And Little Peter Van Mater might have a mother now if it was n't for the support these villains get."

"Those things are sad, Thomas, they are indeed; but you must not forget that the 'Greens' and the Tories, as you call them, did not begin the war. They're trying to stop it, that's all, and 'tis not their fault if it does n't come to an end."

For a moment Tom was silent. He still believed he was right, although he could not find a reply to the words of the old man.

The pause, however, served to recall him to the purpose of his visit, and quickly rising again, he said, "I must beg your pardon, Mr. Edwards, if I have spoken disrespectfully; I did not so mean it. But I must be going now."

"Nay, nay," said Mr. Edwards quickly. "Do not go yet. It is a good ten miles you have to travel. You had better stay here to-night. We'll give you a bed and welcome." As he spoke the man rose and went into the other room from which the sound of the voices had come. He remained only a brief time, but when he returned his agitation was again marked, and in response to his repeated request Tom seated himself, after explaining that it was impossible for him to accept the invitation for the night.

"As I was saying," began Mr. Edwards, his voice trembling strangely and impressing Tom with a sense of fear, "I attribute all this trouble to the presence in this country of the brother of that detestable wretch, old Noll Cromwell! He's the source of it all."

"I did n't know he was ever here."

"Well, he was. I've seen his name myself in the old town book of Middletown, only the rascal did n't have the courage to

sail under his own colors. No, he's Edward Crome there, and sometimes he was known as Edward Crowe, but he was a villain under either name, and scattered the seeds of rebellion against the king. There's a story that away back in 1638 several ships were just on the point of sailing from London for the colonies, and that they had on board Oliver Cromwell himself, and Pym, Hampden, and Haselrig, and some others of the psalm-singing, king-killing, long-faced Puritans; but the king forbade them to go. That was when even the king made a mistake! But Edward Cromwell became Edward Crome, and crawled out of England and crawled into the new colonies like the vile serpent that he was. And one reason why Old Monmouth has given His Majesty so much trouble in the rebellion is because that man — yes, sir, that brother of the round-headed, empty-headed Noll Cromwell himself — preached his detestable doctrines there."

"I think I shall have to go now," said Tom quickly. He was becoming so angry that he was afraid even the gray hairs of the old man or the desire to learn about the colonel in New York would not prevent him from saying something which he might regret.

Instantly the manner of Mr. Edwards changed, and all his former agitation and unaccountable fear returned. "Oh, Thomas, I beg of you not to go. You must know how dangerous the road is, and it is a long journey in the darkness." The old man's voice was trembling and his eagerness was only too apparent.

"I must go," persisted Tom, nevertheless strangely moved by the excitement of Mr. Edwards. He thought he could in a measure understand its cause, and the knowledge only made him the more eager to depart.

"It is not safe. It is not safe. I hear that Davenport and his gang have been seen of late, and they might do you harm. We have a good bed for you, Thomas. I should like to talk more with you concerning Colonel Coward, so that I might give, or rather send, to Stephen, a full description; for I fear I shall not soon see him. Listen to me, Thomas. Wait until to-morrow."

"I thank you, but I promised to be back by sunrise."

Tom resisted the pleadings of the old man who, seeing that further efforts to induce the lad to change his decision would be useless, followed him to the door, and bidding him a

cordial good-night and promising to send his request to Stephen, closed and bolted the heavy door and left the lad alone in the darkness.

For a moment Tom could not see his way. He stood and looked back at the house, in which the lights appeared for a time and then went out, leaving the outlines of the quaint little building dimly seen against the sky. A sense of loneliness and fear crept over the lad. The moon hung low in the eastern sky and, more accustomed to its light now, Tom could see the dark forests in the distance through which lay his way. The wind sighed in the tree-tops and the sound, mournful and weird, served to increase Tom's feelings of fear.

An owl was hooting in the forest, and its long-drawn cries seemed like a call of warning. The bushes that grew in a semicircle about the front of the house assumed fantastic shapes in the moonlight, and for a moment Tom almost decided to go back and accept the invitation to remain until morning.

However, the recollection of his promise to return to Benzeor's by sunrise proved stronger than his momentary fears, and grasping his club, his sole weapon, and assuring himself

that he had nothing to fear, he turned and started swiftly toward the lane.

He had gone as far as the lilac bushes when, with a sudden fear, he beheld an armed man rise from behind them and approach him. Before he could cry out or turn to run, he saw a dozen or more other men also rise, and in a moment he was surrounded by the band. At the same time he perceived several others coming up the lane, keeping close to the fences and evidently striving to escape all observation.

No one as yet had spoken to him, but the leader advanced and, placing his hand upon Tom's shoulder, turned the lad sharply about until the moonlight fell full upon his face.

It all had occurred so suddenly that Tom hardly realized what it meant. In spite of the rapid beating of his own heart, he thought of the agitation of Mr. Edwards, and wondered what his feelings would be when he, too, should discover the presence of the men. His thoughts, however, were instantly recalled to his own condition when he recognized the man before him, and obedient to his whispered word followed him behind the bushes.

CHAPTER III

A SPY IN OLD MONMOUTH

“I AM surprised to find you here in such a place and at such a time as this. I had thought better of you, Tom Coward, than that.”

Captain Joshua Huddy, whom Tom had now recognized as his captor, spoke sternly, and the lad could see that he was regarded with suspicion by the doughty leader in the Monmouth militia.

In the advance which Washington had made in the preceding summer into the county, Captain Huddy had been of great assistance in the troops of General Maxfield; but after the battle he had left the army, and remained to aid the scattered people in their defense against the marauding bands of Tories and refugees. Tom Coward knew him well, and the rugged zeal of the famous Jerseyman had strongly impressed him, as it had all the people of Old Monmouth. Now, however, Tom could see that the unflinching patriot was

startled as well as grieved to find him near the home of Mr. Edwards in that September night in 1778.

"I don't understand you," Tom managed to say at last. "I do not see why you should speak like that to me. I have done nothing of which I am ashamed."

"It should be a cause of shame to you to be seen creeping out of the house of such a Tory as this man Edwards is known to be, at such an hour as this. We have serious work to do this night, and I had little thought of discovering a lad here in whom I had had all confidence."

"But I've done nothing wrong," protested Tom, "I can explain everything to you, I know I can, Captain Huddy."

"Explain it to Captain Jonathan Forman, then," replied Captain Huddy in a low voice, "for he is in command to-night, and here he is. Captain," he added, turning as he spoke to the man who was in charge of the expedition and who now approached, "this lad is Tom Coward. He has just come out of the house, and doubtless will be able to give you some valuable information."

"How now, young man?" said Captain Forman. "How came you here?"

Realizing that he was looked upon with suspicion by both the men, Tom quickly decided that the best thing he could do would be to tell them of the true purpose of his visit, and in a few words he tried to explain it all.

"It may be as you say," replied Captain Forman, "and I trust it may be so. We shall give you an opportunity to explain all that later. Now tell me whom you saw in the house?"

"I saw Mr. Edwards."

"And no one else?"

"No one else."

"Be careful, my lad. We have serious work on hand to-night, and if you do not tell us the truth it may be the worse for you."

Captain Forman spoke sternly and Tom was trembling with excitement and fear. It was not the word of the captain, however, that alarmed him. He was thinking of Mr. Edwards and the inmates of the house, and above all of that woman he had overtaken in the road only a few hours before. He thought he understood the purpose of the visit of the militia now, and his heart went out to the old man who had been so strangely agitated all the evening.

"I have been in the house since dark and I have seen no one there but Mr. Edwards," he said again quietly.

"We've no time to discuss the matter. You will stay and help us now."

Captain Forman turned and in a few low words directed some of his men to surround the house. As soon as he was satisfied that each man had taken the position to which he had been assigned, he called to Captain Huddy and also to four of the men who were standing near, and said, "We'll go into the house now. Come with us," he added to Tom.

There was nothing for the lad to do but obey, and with a great fear in his heart and a strange trembling in his body, Tom advanced with the men to the low door in the front of the house.

There they halted, and with the butt of his pistol Captain Forman rapped sharply upon the panel. In the stillness of the night the summons sounded loud and abrupt. It must have roused the inmates, Tom thought, but as the men waited, no response was made. The shadows of the tall trees in the yard stretched out like spectres. Across the face of the sky patches of clouds were drifting

and for a moment partly shut out the light of the moon. No one spoke, and besides the little band in front of the door none could be seen.

There was something so unreal about it that for a moment Tom could hardly realize where he was or what was being done. He was sharply recalled by the renewed summons of the captain, who again rapped upon the door, and continued his efforts until directly above them they heard a window raised and Tom saw the face of Mr. Edwards appear in the moonlight looking down upon them.

“Who are you?” called the old man. “What do you want? Why do you disturb an old man like this?”

“We want you to come down and open this door,” called the captain. “I am Captain Jonathan Forman of the Monmouth guards, and this house is surrounded by my men. It will save much trouble if you do as I bid.”

The face disappeared from the window, and in a few minutes the bolts were withdrawn and the door was opened by Mr. Edwards, who stood before them holding a lighted candle in his hands.

The men at once entered and hastily closed

and barred the door behind them. The ghastly face of the old man became still more ghastly as he beheld Tom, and the lad could feel that with mingled terror and reproach Mr. Edwards was intently regarding him. Surely, Tom thought, he was in a trying position. He knew that he was regarded with suspicion by his companions, and now it was evident that the old man himself was equally suspicious of him.

“We regret, Mr. Edwards,” began Captain Forman, “that we are compelled to come on such an errand, but we have received word that your son Stephen Edwards is here in this house. It is for him we have come, and it will save much trouble if he is at once delivered into our hands.”

For a moment Tom thought the old man was about to fall; but after a visible effort he regained control of himself and, drawing himself up to his full height and striving desperately to appear bold, he faced the captain and said, —

“You know well that my son Stephen has for six months been with the Associated Loyalists in New York. We have not even had his presence to assist us in repelling such intruding and marauding bands as those who

have this night forced their way into my house."

"We know that Stephen Edwards *has been* with the renegade governor Franklin in New York. We have heard of the treachery of the last governor the king appointed over New Jersey, and, please God, it shall be the last," he added bitterly. "The question is whether Stephen Edwards is here in this house now."

"You must search the place. You would not trust my word."

"Search the house we shall. Come, men," he added to his companions; "we'll begin with the cellar. Captain Huddy, do you stand guard by the door while we are below, and at the first sign of treachery you know what you are to do."

Captain Huddy took the position to which he had been assigned, and as Tom perceived that he was expected to join the men in their search, he started with them toward the door of the cellar. The sad and reproachful eyes of Mr. Edwards followed him, but there was no opportunity for explanations now, and the lad was soon with the men below.

The most careful search, however, failed to reveal the hiding place of the man for

whom they were seeking, and soon the party returned to the room above. Then through all the house they continued their search. Closets were entered, barrels were overturned, but all their efforts were still unrewarded.

"We'll go upstairs now," said Captain Forman.

As they turned, Tom perceived that Mr. Edwards was following them, and the expression of agony upon his face made the lad believe that the search now might not be so fruitless as it had been. However, he silently climbed the stairs with the men, but the most careful search in two of the rooms still failed to reveal any hidden man. One room was all that remained, and as Captain Forman lifted the latch he discovered that the door was bolted.

"We must go in here," he said firmly.

"That is the room of the wife of my son," replied Mr. Edwards. "Surely, surely you will not insist upon disturbing her? Is it not enough that you have driven all the rest of us from our beds?"

"She shall not be harmed, but we must search this room also."

"Then permit her to have time in which to dress, I beg of you."

“She may have three minutes.”

The faltering voice of the old man called to his daughter-in-law, and her response could be heard by all as she promised to comply with the demands of the captain. The men waited in the rude little hallway, but no one spoke. The candle which the captain was holding sputtered and the light died down, and for a moment it seemed to them that they would be left in darkness. Tom's heart was beating furiously and his breathing was fast and labored. Indeed all seemed to be strangely affected as they silently waited, and each seemed to fear as well as hope that something of importance would be discovered in the room which they were about to enter. The captain pinched the wick with his fingers, and as the flame shone forth again the door was suddenly opened and the men were bidden to enter.

As they stepped quickly into the room they beheld the wife of Stephen Edwards standing before them. Her face was even more ghastly than that of her father-in-law, but it was evident that she was making a determined effort to appear bold and indignant.

“We regret, madam,” began Captain For-

man, "that we are compelled to disturb you, but — What have we here?" he suddenly added, as he caught sight of another figure in the bed. A large nightcap had been drawn over the head of the person, whoever it was, and the face was turned toward the wall.

"That is a laboring woman I have been compelled to receive into my own bed," replied Mrs. Edwards quickly. "She will not interfere with your search."

"We must have a look at this laboring woman," said the captain grimly. "Sit up!" he added, turning toward the person in the bed, "and let us see your face."

There was a brief hesitation, and then the "laboring woman" slowly moved herself in the bed and turned her face toward the men. It was mostly covered by the nightcap, but Tom's heart gave a great throb as in the dim light he instantly recognized the woman he had overtaken on the road a few hours before.

And he knew who she was. Strong as was his sympathy for the cause of the colonies, for the moment his sympathy for the young woman and the aged man standing in the room beside him was even stronger. He

glanced from one to the other, but the face of each was almost livid and was watching the captain with an agony that could not find voice. Would the captain recognize the laboring woman as he had?

Tom's suspense was ended when Captain Forman said gently, "We have come for you, Stephen Edwards. I am sorry you have to be taken in this disguise, for I would gladly have spared you, what you and I both know must be the effect of that. Old Monmouth has little cause to show mercy to a spy."

"I am no spy," replied Stephen Edwards defiantly. "I am a prisoner in your hands, it is true, but I am not a spy!"

"You will have an opportunity later to explain how it was you were captured in this disguise. You will now dress and come with us. Hold!" he suddenly added; "we shall have to search your clothing first. Where is it?"

As the young man made no reply, the captain quietly began to examine the room, and soon from under the bed drew forth the clothing which it was at once evident belonged to the prisoner. A hasty search revealed a letter in the pocket of the coat,

and, holding his candle near, the leader at once began to read it.

It was a scene which Tom Coward never forgot. The roughly clad soldiers, the stern-faced captain, the agonized expressions upon the faces of Stephen Edwards's wife and father and mother, the strangely dressed figure of the prisoner in the bed, all combined to impress the lad deeply, and he could easily see that he was not the only one to be strongly moved by the sight.

"This is still more serious," said Captain Forman, as he glanced up from the letter he had been reading. "You know what this letter is?"

"Yes," replied Stephen quietly.

"It is a letter from Colonel Taylor—you know the Tory of Middletown," said Jonathan Forman to Captain Huddy, "to this young man, directing him to come down to Old Monmouth and find out the number of our forces, our defenses, and all he could learn about us. Perhaps the 'Greens' are preparing for another visit," he added bitterly. "Stephen, this is serious business. This letter proves you to be a spy."

"I am no spy!" replied Stephen boldly. "I am a soldier of the king. I have a right

to come down here and visit my wife and my poor father and mother, whom you rebels have robbed of everything they owned."

"Dress and come with us!" said the captain sternly.

The others were bidden to go below while the captain remained with his prisoner. Then the old man seated himself in a chair and, leaning back his head, closed his eyes, while the tears trickled down his cheeks. His aged wife tried to comfort him as she stood by his side and stroked his thin white hair, while Stephen's wife gave way to the sobs and moans she could no longer repress.

Tom Coward was visibly moved himself, and was planning how he might remain and explain that he had had no part in the sad work of that night. But Captain Forman and his prisoner then entered the room, and after a hasty farewell had been granted the sobbing wife and heart-broken father and mother, the word was spoken, and Tom was told that he must depart with the men; and in a few minutes the little band was moving along the road through the forest.

CHAPTER IV

THE MARCH IN THE NIGHT

TOM COWARD was walking by the side of Captain Huddy in the rear of the little procession, in the midst of which was the young prisoner, carefully guarded and watched. No one had spoken since they had departed from the house, and for a time the silence continued to be unbroken. The gloom of Stephen Edwards had in a measure communicated itself to his companions, who, while they had been eager to capture him, had nevertheless keenly felt for the sorrow of his young wife and the uncontrolled grief of his aged father and mother.

To Tom there was not only sympathy for the stout-hearted young prisoner, who had not uttered a word of complaint, but also a feeling of fear for his own safety. He knew that his companions were in a measure suspicious of him, and the fact that he had been discovered departing from the house at a time when the spy was concealed within it, certainly did not

tend to allay his apprehensions. However, he too had been silent, and had waited in the hope that Captain Huddy would permit him to explain more fully how it was that he had happened to be there at such a time.

"I will listen to your story now, my lad," said the captain at last, when a mile or more had been left behind them. "I did not understand in the few words you could speak back by Mr. Edwards's house."

Thus bidden, Tom related all he had to tell. He told of his growing desire to learn something more concerning the Colonel Coward who was said to be with the British army in New York, and how the loneliness of his own position had increased his determination. He made no reference to his meeting with Stephen Edwards and his discovery of his disguise, merely saying that he did not know the son had returned to his father's house, which was true. Of his suspicions he did not feel bound to speak.

"I know it looks suspicious, Captain Huddy," he said, "but 't is true, every word is true just as I told you. You'll believe me, won't you? You know I wouldn't lie to you; and if you don't believe me you can send and ask Lieutenant Gordon. He knows

all about it, for he was the one who first told me about this colonel."

"Of course I believe you, lad. I have n't known you these dozen years without coming to some sort of an understanding about you. But, Tom, my boy, I don't know just how the others may feel about it."

"They'll believe you if they won't me," said Tom eagerly.

"That may be so; but there's one way in which you can set the minds of all at rest."

"What's that?"

"By being enrolled in the Monmouth militia. We need every man we can get."

"I know there is a need of men," said the lad slowly; "but, Captain Huddy, you don't know how I feel about finding out something about my family. I've been Benzeor Osburn's bound boy all these years, and you can't understand what it means to me. It may be that this British officer does n't know anything about me; but I'd like to find out, if it's possible."

"It's no time for such things, my lad," said the captain sternly. "When the hand of every man seems to be against his neighbor in Old Monmouth, surely it's no time for you to be looking up foes, though they may

belong to your own household. Even the dead must bury their own dead now. It is a time when every live man must answer his country's call."

Captain Huddy spoke in a low, intense voice, that greatly impressed the lad by his side. The silent forests, the flickering moonlight, the unbroken tramp of the men, and the presence of the young prisoner, who had been taken amidst such damaging surroundings, were all sufficient to make Tom feel the seriousness of the moment; but the words of the stern, uncompromising patriot by his side were far more impressive. His call was like that of some prophet of old who, alive to the perils and evils of his times, had lifted up his voice against them and, uncompromising in his own zeal, had no sympathy for the wavering or the undecided.

"Nay, Tom, my lad," resumed the captain after a brief silence, "the very lesson of this night is one which ought to put an end to all hesitation on your part. Whether it be a call to life or death," he added solemnly, "matters little. It is a call you cannot lightly put aside."

"But there's Sarah and the children and Little Peter," protested Tom feebly, feeling

his own opposition surely giving way before the intense conviction of the earnest man with whom he was walking.

“They live in Benzeor Osburn’s home, and you know as well as I that there they will not be molested. The patriots would scorn to attack defenseless women and children, and there are good and sufficient reasons for believing that the pine robbers will not molest the possessions of that traitor. Nay, Tom, there are no reasons against your joining us, and there is every reason why you should, not the least of which is the fact that you were discovered this very night coming out of the house in which Stephen Edwards the spy was concealed and disguised. That of itself is enough to make you decide.”

“What will be done with Stephen?” inquired Tom in a low tone, glancing at the prisoner in the midst of the band before him as he spoke.

“That will be decided to-morrow.”

“Will they hang him?”

“If they give him what he deserves,” said the captain solemnly. “To come down here among his old friends and neighbors, and gain information which will permit the ‘Greens’ to return and go on with their plundering,

yes, and murdering, too, for the matter of that, and to help the pine robbers and refugees to carry on their dastardly work, deserves nothing better. It is not a time when, having put our hands to the plough, we can look back. It is an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth ; yes, and a life for a life. It is better that one should perish than that many innocent lives should be lost. Death is in the very air we breathe, my lad," added the captain, dropping his voice to a whisper.

Tom and the officer were some distance behind their comrades now, and the lad glanced nervously about him. His companion's intense zeal, which amounted almost to fanaticism, was born of such strong conviction that the lad felt a shiver of fear creep over him at the words. He glanced into the woods through which they were passing, and for a moment was startled as he thought he discerned a dark form moving among the trees. As the figure quickly disappeared Tom concluded that his eyes must have deceived him, and he looked again at his stern-faced companion.

He felt that Captain Huddy had spoken truly. It was a sad time in Old Monmouth. The presence of the prisoner and the know-

ledge of the perils of which the captain had just spoken, proclaimed the truthfulness of his words. Death was in the very air they breathed, but he little dreamed that night as he marched by the brave captain's side that the life of one of them would be the forfeit for the deeds which Captain Forman's men had committed.

"Captain Huddy," said Tom at last, "I'll think about what you've said. I will go back home, or at least I'll go to Benzeor's, which is all the home I've ever known, and talk it over with Sarah and Little Peter."

"Peter should come too. When will you report to me your decision?"

"I don't know. Just as soon as I can tell what it is."

"That will not do, Tom. Come over to the court-house on Monday morning. Tomorrow is Sunday, and that will give you all the time you need."

"It's Sunday now," said Tom, glancing up at the moon.

"There is ample time before Monday morning. I may obtain permission for you to go home now, if it is understood that you will come to the court-house Monday morning. Will you come?"

“Yes,” said Tom quickly; for the danger which Captain Huddy had just suggested, that it might not be possible for him to leave them now, aided him in making his decision. And between the present and Monday morning many things might happen. At all events, he would give the promise which still did not commit him to joining one of the militia bands.

Both quickened their paces, and Captain Huddy, after advancing and speaking a few low words to Captain Forman, returned to Tom and said, “You may leave us at the road up here, but I shall expect to see you without fail at the court-house on Monday morning.”

“I’ll be there.”

Nothing more was said; and when they arrived at the fork in the roads, Tom quietly turned aside and entered that over which he had come from Benzeor’s. After he had advanced a few paces, he halted and gazed after the departing men, half fearing that they would return and bid him join them again; but they marched steadily forward, and in a few moments there was nothing to be seen but the dim outlines of the road, the swaying trees about him, and the broken clouds overhead which half concealed and half revealed

the moon behind them. At least so thought Tom at the time, but as he turned about he uttered an exclamation of fear as he beheld the form of an armed man. Who he was or how he had approached without making his presence known Tom could not determine; but his fears were in no wise allayed when he discovered that the man was "Colonel Tye," the mulatto leader of a band of refugees composed of whites and blacks, whose names were only too familiar to the sadly beset people of Old Monmouth.

Titus, or "Colonel Tye," as he was familiarly known in the region, had been a slave until the outbreak of the war, when, with many of his dusky companions, he had thrown off the yoke of bondage, and nearly all other yokes as well, and, organizing themselves into a band, they had been among the most active of the refugees or pine robbers. To Colonel Tye's credit be it said that he was looked upon as the most reputable of all the outlaw leaders, and his deeds of cruelty, while no less cruel than those of his white comrades, were still not so frequent, and were not so often directed against the aged or the helpless. He was a huge man, powerful and imposing in his personal appearance, and pos

essed of a degree of intelligence far above that of any of the blacks in the famous old county. He spoke a peculiar language, with but an occasional betrayal of the common negro dialect; and the manner in which he controlled his followers, who implicitly obeyed his commands, showed that he was possessed of qualities of no mean order, which in other times or under other circumstances might have made of the mulatto slave, Titus, a man of whom his race might well have felt proud. What Tom Coward's feelings were when he discovered the presence of the famous, or rather infamous, refugee, may well be imagined.

"Is that you, Colonel Tye?" he managed to falter at last.

"Who the prisoner?" demanded Titus abruptly, ignoring the lad's question.

"A man they took up the road here."

"I know. Tye has followed you and the men all the way. If Cap'n Huddy do any harm to Stephen Edwards, Cap'n Huddy die!"

The black man's voice was low; but Tom felt a sudden shudder creep over him at the words. "How you come to be with Cap'n Huddy?" Titus abruptly demanded.

As it was evident the man already was aware of much that had occurred, Tom briefly related as much of his story as seemed to be necessary, and then said, "What are you doing here, Colonel Tye?"

"What I doing? What I been doing all time. Help black men be free. Redcoats say we be no more slaves if join them. So Tye join; but Tye for self and black men all time. Where you go now?"

"Back to Benzeor's."

Tye suddenly passed his fingers in his mouth and gave a shrill whistle. Startled as Tom was by the unexpected movement, he was no less startled when he beheld Abe, one of the blackest of Benzeor's slaves, appear in the road.

"He go with you," said Colonel Tye abruptly, as he turned and entered the woods.

As Tom marched on with Abe he was inclined to ask many questions of his companion; but as he was aware that little would be gained, he very wisely held his peace. He knew that the escaped slave Titus was in constant communication with the blacks of the county, and that the promise of the freedom he himself had gained had availed to induce many a slave to desert his master and

join the mulatto's band. Of Abe, however, Tom had little fear, for the man's devotion to Sarah was too intense to cause him any anxiety on that score. The presence of Abe with Colonel Tye, while unexpected, was not unaccountable, Tom thought, as they trudged on together through the darkness.

It was just sunrise when they entered Benzor's house. Wearied as he was by the journey, Tom was too excited over the events of the night to remain silent, and the story was soon told. Many were the long and eager conferences held that day by Tom and Little Peter, and Sarah at times was a not unwelcome sharer in their deliberations.

What the results were became manifest, when early Monday morning Tom and Little Peter both started for Monmouth Court-House for the promised interview with Captain Huddy.

It was almost ten o'clock when they drew near to the straggling little village, and just as they turned into the street they stopped and looked carefully at an approaching farm wagon.

On the seat sat a weeping woman, and by her side was a trembling old man who was trying to drive. In the wagon was a long

pine box, and Tom Coward's heart was filled with a great fear when he recognized the young woman as the wife of Stephen Edwards, and the aged driver as her father-in-law.

CHAPTER V

THE DECISION

FOR a moment Tom and his companion gazed at each other, neither being able to give expression to the horror that had seized upon both. The sight of the weeping young woman and the grief-stricken man by her side, as well as that of the long rough box in the wagon, left no room for doubt as to the fate of Stephen Edwards.

Almost overcome by the sight, Tom suddenly darted forward and called to the old man, who apparently had been as unmindful of the approach of the boys as had been his companion.

“Oh, Mr. Edwards, what is it? What has happened? What is it? What is it?”

At the sound of his voice, the trembling old man glanced up, and for a moment the sobbing wife of Stephen Edwards removed her hands from her face; but as soon as she recognized the lad, she broke forth into a passionate denunciation of Tom.

"That's the one who led the soldiers to our house Saturday night," she said, her voice rising almost to a scream as she spoke. "He was the real spy, not my poor Stephen! If it had n't been for him, all this would not have happened! Oh, drive on! Drive on! Don't stop to say a word to him! Not a word! Oh, my poor husband! My poor murdered Stephen!" And overcome by her grief the young woman again buried her face in her hands and moaned and sobbed, her body swaying back and forth and trembling in every member.

Tom Coward was too much stunned by the outburst to utter even a protest, and before he could recover from his astonishment, the wagon had gone on, while the two lads stood still and gazed after it as if they hardly could comprehend what they had heard and seen.

As soon as it became evident that it had really departed, and that Mr. Edwards, either because of his own sorrow or because he had been moved by the protest of Stephen's wife, did not intend to listen to any words of explanation by Tom, Peter said in a low voice :

"Come on, Tom ; we'll go and find Captain Huddy."

"And he'll blame me, too, because he

thinks I was taking the part of Stephen Edwards," said Tom bitterly. "I'm almost afraid to tell him that we have decided not to join the militia. He'll be more suspicious of me now than he was before."

"Can't help that," replied Peter sturdily. "We've got to see him anyway."

It was at once evident to the boys as they entered the little village that something of unusual importance had recently occurred, for groups of villagers or of soldiers could be seen talking together on the street, and the strong but subdued excitement was manifest in the eagerness with which they discussed something which had aroused them all. Neither of the boys stopped to make any inquiries, however, and soon discovered the man for whom they were searching, in the street before them.

"Oh, Captain Huddy!" exclaimed Tom impulsively, as he caught sight of the stern old soldier, "did they hang Stephen? We saw his wife and father both here, and they had a great pine box in the wagon with them. Did they hang him?"

"Stephen Edwards is dead," said the captain solemnly.

"Did they hang him?"

“Yes, they hanged him. He knew what his fate would be if he was caught when he ventured to come into Old Monmouth, dressed in that disguise and with those letters of Colonel Taylor in his pockets. He knew all about it. He took his chances, and met a fate he richly deserved.”

“But his poor wife and father!” said Tom.

“Yes, they are to be pitied; but not so much as the honest people of Old Monmouth. They are the ones I feel most sorrow for. My lad, these are wild times, and heroic measures are all that can avail now. No one is safe. The murders and outrages are more than we can stand; and when such a man as Stephen Edwards comes down among his old friends and neighbors to open the way for others to come in and join such men as the pine robbers Hetfield, and Bacon, and Lippencott, and Davenport, and the rest of the vile crew, — every one of whom holds a commission from the Board of Associated Loyalists in New York, as the traitors call themselves, and of which that arch traitor of them all, William Franklin, the last royal governor of New Jersey, is the head and chief, — it’s time for honest men to rouse themselves and protect their wives and children.”

Captain Huddy's face became still more stern as he spoke, and the lads, impressed by his fierceness as well as by the recent hanging of the spy, could find no words in which to reply. The grim old warrior again was like some prophet who in the years past appeared to denounce the evils that threatened his country on every side.

"You have come to join us now?" said the captain briefly, a moment later.

"We — we — did n't just see how we could," stammered Tom. "We've talked it all over and don't see how we can do it, Captain Huddy. Here's Little Peter, his father is a prisoner in New York, you know, and he wants to do what he can to get him out; and then there are all the children, too — we did n't see how we could leave them."

"Where's Little Peter's mother?" inquired Captain Huddy abruptly.

"She's dead," said Tom softly. "You know all about that."

"And how did she die? Who was the cause of her death?" he demanded sternly. "Was it not just such a band of pine robbers as is to be found on almost every side now? Yow have suffered, Little Peter, and you know something of what these villains are

likely to do at any time. I should think that your own experiences would lead you to join in defending others from these wretches. You have no right to draw back, for we have need of every man we can get in times like these! As for getting your father out of the Sugar House in New York, you would do about as much as a fly crawling up the sides of the walls! Your father has either gone out of the windows of that old stone building straight up to heaven, or if he has n't, the best thing you can do to help him is to join the men who are not only striving to set the prisoners free, but to prevent other boys' fathers from becoming prisoners at all."

"But how can I leave the children? There's no one but Sarah to look out for them now. I don't see how I can leave them," protested Peter.

"I have already told Tom that the children are not in the least danger so long as they are at Benzeor Osburn's; and as for protecting them,—what could two such boys as you do alone against any band which was to take it into their heads to attack the place, which is n't in the least likely?"

As neither Tom nor Little Peter made any reply, and as it was also evident that they

were strongly moved by the almost fierce appeal of the old soldier, Captain Huddy continued: "As you know, boys, the militia of Old Monmouth is divided up and stationed in four different places in the county. I'm down near Toms River for the present, and that's where you are to come. We're to look out for the salt works and fight back the pine robbers. The militia in the upper part of the county is to meet the 'Greens' if they come. Our duty is the more difficult, but that will not make either of you flinch, I know. When the Lord wanted to make of Saul of Tarsus a great soldier of the cross, he first showed unto him what things he must suffer for His sake. It's no holiday affair, no general training day, to which I'm calling you, boys; but it's work, — grim, hard, dangerous work, that's just what it is. People say I'm becoming a fanatic, and I am. If to realize the awful dangers that beset us all in these lawless times in Old Monmouth is the part of a fanatic, then surely I am one. Will you join us, boys?" he added solemnly.

"Yes, if Tom will," said Little Peter.

"I'll do it if we don't have to come down to Toms River till next week," said Tom. "There are some things that must be done before we leave."

“There are no things which ‘*must*’ be done first. You are without excuse, both of you. You are like the men who heard the call and wanted to prove the yoke of oxen, or bury their fathers, or look out for the new wife first. Suffer me first to — There *is* no ‘first.’”

But Tom Coward, impressed as he was by the almost wild fanaticism of the captain, was nevertheless determined, and clung sturdily to his decision not to join the militia until a week later; and with the promise to report at that time to him at Toms River, Captain Huddy was forced to be content.

To the surprise of both boys, they found when they returned to Benzeor’s that the sturdy Sarah did not oppose their new project, but even urged them to go.

“We shall be as safe with Abe here as if you two were to stay,” declared the resolute girl, “and this hanging of Stephen Edwards shows that something terrible is going to happen. Such men as Captain Huddy and Captain Forman would n’t do a thing like that unless they knew there was some fearful need of it. It is n’t like either of them!”

To this word of Sarah there was no response. The demand for men to serve in

the militia was so strong and the appeals so urgent that the decision of the boys seemed to both now to be right.

There was, however, none of the glamour of war about it. Tom, at least, had seen the horrors in the terrible struggle between the forces of Washington and Clinton on the plains of Monmouth in the preceding June, and, as has been said, the memories of that battle were still with him by night and by day. The problem of the present must be faced, however, and seriously the two lads set about making their preparations for leaving home, if Benzeor's house might be called by that name, and joining the ranks of the militia on the appointed day.

Accordingly the work on the farm was rushed, and many were the directions given to Abe for the defense and welfare of those who, to a great extent, would now be dependent upon him.

One thing which greatly strengthened the boys in their purpose to join Captain Huddy's forces was the effect on Old Monmouth of the hanging of Stephen Edwards, the spy. The excitement of the people, already wrought up to a high tension by the previous experiences of the war, now became intense. It

was the one theme of conversation wherever two or three people met. Bitter were the denunciations of the half-hearted, and great were the fears of the timid that the deed would bring upon the people of the county the fiercest wrath of the redcoats in New York. The bolder ones declared that the redcoats had already done their utmost to ruin the patriots, and could now do no worse than before. Indeed, the hanging of a spy, especially when he had been known among them from his earliest boyhood, might, on the other hand, serve as a warning, and might make even the redcoats or the "Greens" hesitate before they made another attack upon the people of Old Monmouth.

But whatever were the opinions held, the death of Stephen Edwards served to intensify them. If any of the fires had been slumbering, they now burst into flames again. Whig and Tory, pine robber and militia, redcoat and Jersey Blue, became more and more intense in their hatreds, and with every passing day the conditions of the people became worse. And the only barrier between the suffering patriots and their foes was the militia, in which our two boys were soon to be enrolled.

Before they departed for Toms River, Tom

had determined to go over to the home of Mr. Edwards and strive to set himself right with him. The bitter words of Stephen's wife, denouncing him as the one who had led her husband to his death, could not be forgotten, and daily became an increasing source of sorrow to the troubled boy; and at last he decided to make the long journey once more and attempt, at least, to convince the household that he had been innocent of any share in the sad events which had led up to the hanging of the captured spy.

There was danger in the attempt, Tom well understood; and in spite of Captain Huddy's urgent words for him to join the Monmouth militia, he could not entirely shake off the feeling that the stern old warrior was not altogether satisfied with the explanation he had given of his presence in the Edwards' house at the time when Stephen had been discovered, disguised and present within it.

However, the vision of Stephen's heart-broken wife and of his trembling old father, when he had met them with their sad burden, would not depart; and, come what might, Tom Coward had decided that he would once more go to them and strive to explain his own part in the tragedy.

Accordingly, one afternoon, only two days before the time set for their departure for Toms River, Tom started on his long journey.

He was not molested on the way ; but, to his surprise, when he arrived at the home of Mr. Edwards, he discovered that the house had been abandoned. The doors were open, and the few pieces of furniture had been removed. The only sign of life about the place was a cat, which refused to accept his invitation to draw near, and at the first approach on the part of Tom, darted swiftly into the woods and was seen no more.

Tom did not linger long about the deserted house. It was near night-fall, and the desolation served to increase his own sense of loneliness, for no object is more forlorn than a deserted house. Its very presence speaks a language all its own. The unprotected windows, the unclosed doors, the absence of the curling smoke from the rude stone chimney, the silence which rested over all where but recently the sound of a woman singing at her work or the cheery voice of a man engaged in his tasks about the place might have been heard, unite to deepen the impression of gloom in one who beholds the spot.

And when to all these was added the thought of the fate of Stephen Edwards, only a few days before full of life and as eager as any young soldier of King George could well be, the effect upon Tom Coward was not slight.

With a trembling heart, which the sturdy lad could not entirely control, and even his disappointment for the moment forgotten, he turned and once more entered the road which led through the forest, now dark with the shadows of night.

CHAPTER VI

THE DEPARTURE FROM THE CAMP

MANY times that night as he walked homeward, Tom stopped and peered carefully into the forests by the roadside, thinking that he had discovered some form moving about among the great trees. But each time his fears proved to be groundless. No man approached him, nor was he molested in all his journey.

His fears were not altogether without foundation ; for, as the lad well knew, more than a dozen of the detested pine robbers had already been executed by the angry patriots of Old Monmouth, and their lifeless bodies had been left hanging from the trees near the court-house as a warning of what the fate of their companions might be if they did not cease their deeds of violence. But usually the warnings had been unheeded, and the most that the stern measures which the patriots adopted to protect their homes and themselves accomplished, had been to intensify

the bitter feelings already apparently wrought up to the highest pitch. Tom's fears, therefore, were not unnatural ; but the stout-hearted lad soon after midnight arrived safely at the home of Benzeor Osburn, and, wearied by his long journey, was glad to crawl into his rude bed in the loft over the kitchen.

The two days remaining before the departure of the boys were busy ones ; but they were soon gone, the farewells were spoken, and Tom and Little Peter, the former taking the rifle of Benzeor, which he had not hesitated to appropriate, and the latter with his own musket, set forth on their way to Toms River to join Captain Huddy's band of militia. The journey was too long to be accomplished in one day, and at nightfall the boys sought the house of a well-known patriot, and there remained until morning.

Before sunrise, refreshed and thoroughly rested, they had resumed their march, and knew that the place they were seeking was now not more than five miles distant. Their spirits rose as they drew nearer the camp, and with the thought that they were soon to be with the defenders of the county there even came a sense of exhilaration, in marked contrast to the depression which had been theirs

when they had been farther away. Perhaps, also, the sense of having arrived at a decision aided them, for it is often true that the longer one hesitates over a known duty the stronger becomes the unwillingness to decide; but the decision once having been made, the clouds scatter as the mists are burned away by the beams of the rising sun.

At all events, when about half of the remaining distance had been covered our boys were in much better spirits than they had been for months, and it was with more of a feeling of surprise than alarm that they beheld an armed man coming across the cleared lots before them, evidently desirous of gaining the same road along which they were walking.

At that moment the man also discovered them, and after hesitating a moment quickened his pace and soon joined them. As he approached, the boys perceived that he was evidently an Irishman, perhaps seven or eight years older than either of them. His rugged face beamed with good nature, and whatever fears the lads might have felt were speedily banished as the stranger hailed them.

“The top of the mornin’ to yez, me byes!” he said, as he climbed the fence and entered the road. “It’s travelin’ arly yez are.”

"You're not very much behind us so far as time is concerned," replied Tom.

"Indade, and that's true for yez. Be yez agin us or fur us?"

"That's difficult to say till we know who you are and which side you belong to."

"Who am Oi, is it? Indade, and me name's Michael Connors. Oi thought everybody was after knowin' that. Ye're no murderin' pine robbers, Oi take it," he added, glancing nervously at his companions.

"You're right there," replied Little Peter.

"Indade and of coorse Oi'm corriect," said Michael, evidently relieved by the information. "Moike Connors niyer makes any mistake in that line, Oi'd be after tellin' yez. I did n't jest understand yer names, me byes."

"We did n't give them," laughed Tom. "What are you in such a hurry for?" he inquired, as the sturdy Michael began to increase his speed.

"Ah-h-h! And that's a sacret. Yez did n't think fur a minit that Moike Connors would be after tellin' such a sacret as that he was bound for the camp of the militia at Toms River, did yez? Not much, me byes!"

"Then you are going to the camp at Toms River, are you?" said Tom quickly.

"Bedad, and how did yez know that?" Michael stopped for a moment and gazed at his companions with an expression of such innocent amazement at their knowledge that both boys laughed aloud.

"Oh, we're bound for the same place," said Tom, "and we can tell a man who is going there, every time."

"No! Can yez that?" was Michael's reply, his admiration for the keenness of his companions again being very apparent. "Indade, and Oi wish that Oi could be after tellin' that same. It would have saved me a bit of a shindy back here. Not that Oi mind a bit of a rub wid a shillalah; but whin a man gits that drunk that he can't be after doing anything wid his stick but yell and smash the windies, it's no use that Moike Connors has fur him, at all, at all."

"What's the trouble, Mike?" inquired Tom. "Been having a fracas?"

"Ye're after bein' so smart, mebbe yez can tell about that widout me tellin' yez, the way yez found out where I was a-goin'," replied Michael with an attempt to wink shrewdly at them. "Not much, me byes; yez will never be after larnin' from me that Billy Giberson is back there in that tavern."

Moike Connors can kape a sacret. He can that."

William, or "Billy," Giberson was one of the detested pine robbers, and his name was a familiar one to our boys. The information which Michael had unwittingly given that the man was near by and doubtless engaged in some drunken carousal, was certainly startling, to say the least.

Tom motioned to Little Peter to remain silent, and then turned to the Irishman and said, "Mike, I did n't believe that Giberson could ever drive you out of a tavern alone. He must have had a good many men to help him."

"He did that," replied Michael eagerly. "But, bedad! how yez found it out is too much fur me. How did yez be after larnin' that, me bye?"

"Oh, I reckon every boy in Old Monmouth knows that Mike Connors can't be beaten with a shillalah."

"It's right yez are, me bye," replied Michael delightfully. "Indade, and that same miserable spalpeen, Bill Giberson, would n't fight at all, at all. He's just carousin' round there, he and thim pine thieves, until ivery man is in terror of his life. He

is that, and, bedad, Oi'm after the militia to git him. Shure! and they'll niver have a better chance!"

"Do you know he is there?" inquired Tom. "Are you sure of it?"

"Am Oi shure if it, is it? Look there, will yez?" And Michael drew up the sleeve of his coat and revealed a fresh wound which he declared had been made by a thrust of Giber-son's own bayonet.

The information that this man was so near was of sufficient importance to cause the boys to increase their speed, but as they walked rapidly onward Michael's busy tongue refused to be quiet. He explained that about three years before this time, with a shipload of his fellow-townsmen, he had been brought from Ireland to Old Monmouth, and then with others sold at auction to pay for his passage across the ocean.

Not that Michael had in reality been sold as a slave; but it was customary to sell the services of those who had been unable to pay their way to the New World, for a certain number of years, the number to be determined by the "bid" of the farmers of the region, who assembled at the auctions the ship's owners held. The result of the bidding was that

the unfortunate Irish lad or lass was bound out for the period agreed upon, and the owner paid no wages to them, all that they were supposed to have earned going to the owners of the vessel for their passage. At the end of the period these Irishmen were declared to be free, and could make such arrangements for their time and services as seemed best to them, and no one might interfere. Michael's time had not yet expired, it was discovered in the course of conversation; but as his owner or master had been a bitter and pronounced Tory, the Irishman naturally had chosen the other side in the struggle, and his patriotism^{*} had been further increased by the knowledge that his own freedom could not be questioned if he joined the ranks of the militia.

On his way to Toms River for that very purpose, he had put up the preceding night at Falkinberg's tavern, a well-known inn in the region; but his slumbers had been disturbed by the arrival of Giberson and some of his boon companions, who, without the formality of paying for what they took, simply seized upon all they desired in the famous old tavern, and throughout the night had made the place resound with their revels.

Michael had slipped quietly out of the

house and started swiftly for the camp at Toms River, rightly thinking that the knowledge that the pine robber was so near would be eagerly hailed by the soldiers there. Nor was he mistaken. With Tom and Little Peter he reported immediately after his arrival to Captain Huddy, and the information he brought at once produced a keen excitement in the camp.

Tom and Little Peter had not had much time to examine the camp. They had been quietly received by the captain and assigned a lodging-place, for the men were quartered in the few rude buildings, there being only one or two tents about the place. They had there deposited the few personal effects they had brought with them, and then gone out to look over the place.

About forty men were there. Some of them were dressed in the blue home-dyed suits which had won for some of the soldiers the name of "Jersey Blues," but for the most part the men had no uniforms, and but few had rifles. They were a sturdy band, nevertheless, the most of them being young and determined.

As Tom and his companion an hour afterwards approached the centre of the camp

they beheld a large wagon to which four horses had been hitched, and it was evident from the preparations that were being made that some of the men were about to depart. Their errand was not difficult to guess, and as just then Tom spied Captain Huddy busily inspecting certain of the guns, the lad approached him and said, —

“ Captain Huddy, are these men going up to Falkinberg’s tavern after Giberson ? ”

Evidently Captain Huddy did not regard the question as impertinent, and indeed the familiarity between the men and officers in the militia of Old Monmouth at that time was a matter taken for granted. They were simply friends and neighbors banded together for the defense of their own families and possessions, and the military etiquette did not enter largely into their consideration.

“ Yes,” replied the captain.

“ May I go ? Little Peter would like to go, too.”

Tom said nothing of his own strong desire, now that he had been enrolled, to banish any thought which might still be lurking in Captain Huddy’s mind of his part in the arrest of Stephen Edwards the spy ; but perhaps he was understood, for the leader replied, “ There

are only eight going, my lad, seven besides Mike Connors, who told us Giberson was there. I don't know but you might go. Yes, go if you want to. Climb in, for they 're off in a minute now."

Taking their guns, the lads, unmindful of any thought of fatigue, and stirred by the excitement of the venture, seated themselves by the side of the irrepressible Michael, three soldiers having been assigned to each seat; the driver grasped the reins and gave the word to the horses, and the band departed from the camp amidst the cheers of their comrades.

The spirits of all the men in the party were high, for it had been reported that Giberson had only two or three men with him, and the capture of the pine robber was looked upon as certain. The men were even speculating upon what would be done with the prisoner, and many were the boasts of what the effect of his capture would be upon the other marauding bands in the region.

The novelty of the situation had been sufficient to keep Tom and Little Peter comparatively silent, but the loquacious Michael by their side could not be repressed. He laughed and told stories, and was so irresistibly droll

at times that the boys were compelled to join in the laughter that invariably followed his words.

As they came nearer to Falkinberg's tavern, however, the laughter gradually ceased and the more serious part of their venture became apparent. The men were watching carefully now, and the swift paces of the horses became slower.

"There's the bridge, bedad!" said Michael, "and jist over the little hill is the tavern. That's where we'll be after gettin' the thafe!"

The boys peered anxiously ahead. Only one person had been seen on their ride, and that was a man who, at their approach, had hastened into the woods and speedily disappeared. Nor was any one to be seen now. The rough, sandy road wound around the hillside, and the rude bridge and the winding ascent on the other side could alone be seen.

Down the hill moved the wagon and across the low bridge. Just as it had gained about the middle of the ascent on the farther side, and the horses were straining under their load, suddenly, with a yell which caused the cheeks of others besides our boys in the wagon to blanch, a band of men rose from

the bushes on one side of the road in advance of them, and, quickly bringing their guns to their shoulders, fired directly at the approaching wagon.

In an instant there was a scene of indescribable confusion. The horses were rearing and plunging, the men in advance were shouting and calling to others who were behind the bushes on the opposite side of the road, while those in the wagon had risen to their feet. The frightened horses prevented them from using their guns, but it seemed as if every one was calling out directions, no two of which were alike.

At last the driver managed to turn his horses about, and plying his whip started swiftly down the road again. The shouting then redoubled. To Tom it seemed as if men were rising on every side and the frightened horses were only crawling over the road. The excitement did not decrease when, just as the heavy load came thundering upon the bridge, the tongue slipped from its place and, falling against one of the timbers, brought the wagon to a sudden standstill.

CHAPTER VII

A DANGEROUS UNDERTAKING

THE sudden stop threw every one in the wagon from his seat, and the mishap brought forth a wild cheer from the men on the hill. Again the reports of their guns rang out, but the bullets flew far over the heads of the party on the bridge. For some reason no pursuit was made, but the demoralized patriots, evidently thinking that the attacking party far outnumbered them, and expecting every moment that a rush would be made, were in a state bordering on panic.

For a moment it seemed as if complete demoralization had seized upon them. The wild shouts of the men behind them, the plunging horses over which the driver seemed to have lost all control, the displaced wagon-tongue, and the rude shock which had thrown the men from their seats, combined to increase the confusion.

Tom Coward had been thrown heavily against the seat in front of him, and, as he

rose to his feet, for a moment he was dazed. The shouts of the men on the hillside quickly recalled him to the true condition of affairs, and as he also perceived just at that time the accident which had befallen them, without a thought of the consequences he leaped from the wagon and ran hastily to the horses and endeavored to quiet them. Perceiving that his efforts were likely to avail little, for the frightened beasts were snorting and rearing in their vain attempts to drag their heavy load across the bridge, he stepped boldly in among them, and after one or two attempts restored the fallen tongue to its place.

Then hastily clambering into the wagon again, he bade the driver take his reins and start.

No second invitation was needed, and the frightened man, standing erect in his place, shouted to his horses and plied the lash; and, with a burst of speed which no one of the company protested against, the running horses started swiftly across the bridge, and with speed but little abated bore up the hill on the farther side.

The shouts of the men on the opposite side of the bridge redoubled as they saw the frantic haste of the escaping party, and a few

rushed out into the road and discharged their guns ; but no harm was done, and still for some strange reason they did not offer to pursue.

On and on fled the men, the horses not being permitted to abate their speed, the driver still shouting to them and using his whip with unabated vigor. On they ran up the hillside and into the sandy road. The shouts of the men they were leaving behind them became more and more indistinct and soon could no longer be heard, but the speed of the rushing horses was not slackened. The heavy wagon swayed, the men were thrown from side to side with every leap of the terrified beasts ; but the glances of fear which all cast behind them betrayed the alarm which as yet had in no way subsided.

At last when the heaving sides and streaming flanks of the poor beasts clearly showed that they could no longer maintain the pace at which they were going, the driver brought them to a walk and glanced back at his companions. The reaction had now come, and in the knowledge that they were not pursued the men looked at one another as if every one would be glad to have his companion explain what it had all been about. From

what, or from whom, had they been fleeing? And what was the cause of the retreat?

Some of them evidently were ashamed of the display they had made, and one or two ventured to suggest that they should return and meet the pine robbers on their own ground and endeavor to wipe out the disgrace of the flight. The glances which some of the men cast behind them at the words, and the fact that the sun was low, now just to be seen above the tops of the trees in the forests, showed that the proposal would not be considered with favor, and the direction of the journey remained unchanged.

But with the escape from the pine robbers behind them there now remained the report which must be made to their companions in the camp, and the thought was evidently not a pleasurable one. What could they say? How could they explain the disgraceful action? As they talked together in low tones, one magnified the number of those who had been concealed in the bushes, and another felt certain that several must have been wounded by the volleys which had been fired at them. The longer they talked the larger the number of men in the pine robbers' band seemed to be; but not even the

largest number suggested seemed to afford the relief desired from that meeting with the stern-faced commander, Captain Huddy.

Even the loquacious Michael had been silent; but when the sun had entirely disappeared from sight and only three miles remained between them and the camp, he turned to Tom and said, "That was a brave thing yez did, me bye. It's not such a bold leap as that, Mike Connors himself would be after makin'. Billy Giberson would have had us, that he would, ivery one of us, if yez had n't just fixed that tongue for us, when yez did."

"Brave?" replied Tom. "Brave? I never thought of being brave! It was just because I was almost scared out of my wits that I did it. I expected every minute that Giberson's band would be down the hill and get us all. And there we were stuck fast with that wagon-tongue braced against the planks in the bridge and holding us there as if we'd been nailed. I never thought of being brave. I did it because I was almost scared to death."

"'T was a brave deed nivertheless," said Michael. "It is n't every bye in Ould Monmouth that would dare to be after doin' that

much, with two hundred howlin' pine robbers a rushin' at him from ivery side."

"Two hundred?"

"Tree hundred Oi said," replied Michael soberly, "though Oi'm not sure at all, at all, that there was n't foive hundred of the murderin' rascals."

Tom laughed outright at the Irishman's statement and the sober face with which he made it. The danger was past now and he could afford to make light of the encounter, but he himself had seen only five men in the road when the unexpected attack had been made.

Michael's statement, however, instantly received confirmation from others in the wagon, and Tom did not know whether to think that he had been mistaken in his estimate, or that the men were striving to persuade themselves that they had been attacked by overwhelming numbers, and thus find an excuse for the sorry report they must make to the captain.

That report must soon be made now, for they were drawing nearer the camp; and soon after night-fall the weary horses and shame-faced men stopped before the door of the house in which Captain Huddy was staying, and the leader left his companions to enter

the building. His manifest reluctance left no doubt as to his fears of the reception he was likely to receive; but his comrades, evidently rejoiced that the task was not to be theirs, speedily departed and sought their own quarters.

Many were the inquiries made that evening of the returning force, but for some strange reason about all that any one would say was that they had been ambushed and attacked by a large number of the pine robbers, and that they were fortunate to have escaped with their lives.

Tom and Little Peter, we may be sure, had but little to say, and were only too well pleased to be left with Michael, who also seemed to have lost much of his flow of language. Their surprise therefore was the greater when a little later they received a summons for all three to report to Captain Huddy himself. The summons must be obeyed, whatever their feelings; and with a sense of anxiety not one of the three could conceal, they soon started towards the quarters of the leader.

"Did Oi say tree or foive hundred, me byes?" inquired Michael anxiously, as they approached the rude little abode of Captain

Huddy. "It's true for yez that I could n't just see up the road for the crowd of the spalpeens, but me eyes niver desaved me yit. Is it tree or foive, me byes?"

"Just about five, I think," said Tom gloomily.

He was thinking that it had not been a very bright beginning for his military career. Perhaps now Captain Huddy might think he was not only mixed up in the affair which had ended in the death of Stephen Edwards, but was even concerned in the disgraceful flight of the militia when they had been fired upon by the members of Giberson's band. Altogether the lad was in a sad state of mind over the outcome of the expedition upon which he had begged the privilege of going with his friend, Little Peter.

"Right yez are," said Michael enthusiastically, all unaware of the thoughts in Tom's mind. "Now, me byes, how would it do for me to be after sayin' to Cap'n Huddy, — 'Cap'n Huddy,' sez Oi, 'the top of the marnin' to yez; may yer shaddy niver grow liss, at all, at all. We're that sorry, Cap'n, that we could n't jist bring back to yez that same Billy Giberson — bad cess to the loikes of him! — but seein' as how we made a bold

stand and shot some tin or more of the murderin' villains, and seein' as how there was about sivin hundred o' thim, and only about eight of us" —

"Oh, hold on, Mike," said Little Peter. "Tom means five, not five hundred" —

"Indade, and yez can't mane that, me bye!" said Michael aghast. "It's true for yez that mebbe there was n't more nor tree hundred of them" —

"Five's all I saw," interrupted Tom quickly.

"Yez jist did n't see them thin, at all, at all. We'll say two hundred thin, an' not a sowl liss. How does that be after strikin' the likes o' yez?"

"Five."

"Will, thin, we'll say fifty and be done with it. That's a fair compromise, me bye. Fifty of the murderin' villains come at us from ivery side, after we'd used our shillalahs and knocked over a good tin of thim; we had to" —

"Five," repeated Tom decidedly.

"No! no! It's not after bein' so cruel as that, yez would be, me byes! No! no! Jist think of the sound of that same. Mike Connors with a good sthick in the hands of him

could lay out any twinty of the wretches. No, no; it's not so cruel as that yez could be, at all, at all!"

They were now in front of the door, and further conversation was therefore prevented. In response to their summons they were speedily admitted, and entered the room in which Captain Huddy was alone. He was seated at a table and carefully examining some maps or papers before him, but as the trio entered he rose and quietly greeted them.

"You did n't have a very successful venture to-day, boys, if what I hear is true."

"Not very, I'm afraid," replied Tom.

"Sivin," whispered Michael, in such a loud tone that he could be heard by all in the room. He was standing directly behind Tom, and the word was evidently designed to recall to the lad's mind the necessity of agreeing upon their figures without delay.

Captain Huddy apparently did not heed the interruption, and without glancing at Mike, said, "How many should you think were in Giberson's gang?"

"Fifty! fifty, me bye! Make it fifty!" whispered Michael to Tom. His words were clearly heard by all, and even the stern features of the captain relaxed for a moment.

"I don't know, Captain Huddy. They must have got word of our coming, somehow, and hid in the bushes. When they fired at us we were taken by surprise, and I don't believe any one could tell how many were in the band."

"Did they come out into the road when they fired at you?"

"Yes; that is, they did after the first shot."

"Beggin' yer pardon, yer honor," interrupted Michael, unable longer to remain silent, and advancing with his hat held awkwardly in his hands, "the byes here could n't jist see. They 're only byes, yez know, and not havin' had much of any exparience, they could n't be after countin' the spalpeens. It's true for yez, Cap'n Huddy, that there was ivery bit of sivin"—here Michael caught a glimpse of Tom's face and hesitated for a minute. "I was that busy, yer honor, for what with me shillalah and the fists of me two hands, it may be that I could n't be after seein' just straight; but unless me two eyes desaved me there was ivery bit of sivin"—

"That's about the same number the others gave me," interrupted the captain. "One said five, and one six."

"But, yer honor," began Michael again,

"Oi was n't after jist namin' sivin; but what I was jist a-goin' to say was that there was sivin"—

"Be still," said the captain sternly. The abashed Michael drew back for a moment, and then Captain Huddy said to Tom, "I hear you did a brave deed, my boy."

Tom's face flushed with pleasure, but he was too honest a lad to be willing to receive praise for what was not true, and said, "I don't know that I understand."

"I refer to the wagon-tongue which you put back into place after it fell out."

"That was n't because I was brave, but because I was n't."

"Don't yez be after believin' him, yer honor," protested Michael, stepping boldly forward once more. "He is the same bye what did the deed, whin the men sat there like a lot of silly childers."

"Why did n't you fix it, Mike?" inquired the captain. "You were out on the ground laying about you with that shillalah of yours, you say"—

"Oi was that," replied Michael, without hesitating an instant; "but yez see, me eye was on Bill Giberson all the toime. It was not even toime that Oi had to wink with one

of me eyes, to say nothin' of usin' the two of thim."

Even Captain Huddy laughed at Michael's words; but his stern manner quickly returned, and he said to the boys: "Something must be done, boys. I'm not to stay here at Toms River, for I'm going to Mannahawkin to the militia there. As you know, or perhaps you don't know, these pine robbers have assigned different parts of Old Monmouth to different bands, and each keeps pretty closely to its own. Down here Giberson and Bacon are the worst, and I was hoping that we'd have one of them to-day."

"So yez would, Cap'n," interrupted Michael, "only me shillalah was n't"—

"Be quiet, Mike," said the captain sternly. "Now," he resumed, "we have discovered that one, at least, of these men has a hiding place in a piece of woods about six or seven miles up here in the county, and what we want to do now is to find it."

Tom and Little Peter did not speak, although both of them thought they could perceive what the captain's purpose was.

"Now, then, I want you two boys," said Captain Huddy, "to go up there and find that place. It's a dangerous undertaking, I

know ; but you can do it, and it must be done. After this disgraceful failure to-day they'll be bolder than ever, and no man's place will be safe. You'll have to go unarmed."

"Why? Can't we take our guns?" inquired Little Peter.

"No; they would increase your danger. You wear no uniforms, and have no weapons, and if you should be discovered in the woods you'd be taken for some farmer boys, and that's all. If you were armed the case would be different. But you must find that hiding place. And then as soon as you have done that, report here, and a plan will be agreed upon."

"When are we to start?" said Tom.

"To - morrow morning before sunrise. You'll take a little food with you; but I shall give you directions about where you can get some more, and can go in case you have need of help. You may be away from camp only a few hours, and you may be gone a week; no one can tell."

"Shure, cap'n," interrupted Michael, "yez will not be after lettin' two such byes go alone? Let me go wid 'em."

Captain Huddy hesitated a moment, and then said, "Very well, go with them, Mike,

if you wish, only keep your tongue between your teeth. Now, boys, that's all I have to say. It's a dangerous task, and much will depend upon yourselves. It may be some time before I shall see you again, but I am confident you will do well. Good-by;" and after he had shaken the hand of each they at once departed.

It was early in the following morning when the trio departed from the camp. Only one or two of the men were aware of their errand, for it was thought to be wiser, as well as safer, for it not to be known, so that no demonstration was made. The October sun was well up in the sky when Tom, who was the leader of the little band, led the way from the road, and the three entered within the shadows of the primeval forest.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE FOREST

FOR about two minutes the little party moved on after they had entered the woods, glancing frequently before them for a sight of the men for whose abode they had come to seek. The deep silence all about them, the tall trees and the gloom of their shadows, as well as the dangerous nature of the errand upon which our boys had come, all combined to make them watchful, even the loquacious Michael himself not having spoken since they had left the road.

The thought that they themselves might be seen before they obtained a glimpse of the hated pine robbers, had a tendency to increase their nervousness; and at last Tom, unable to endure the suspense longer, turned to his companions and said in a low voice,—

“This will never do. We don’t even know where we are going, and if Billy Giberson or any of his cronies should see us we’d furnish too good a mark for them, standing up here three in a row.”

“What can we do, Tom?” said Little Peter anxiously. “We can’t turn back.”

“We don’t want to turn back; but there’s no use in going on this way. It would take us a week to scour these woods, and then three of us would only do as much as one, if we keep together all the time.”

“Bedad, an’ Oi’m not goin’ to be after lavin’ yez,” said Michael sturdily.

“You’ll have to, Mike. Now, what I propose is this. It’s about five miles through these woods to the road on the other side, and if I remember aright it’s about as far up and down the road we left. Now, if one of us went back to the opposite corner, and one of us kept straight in here through the woods, he’d come out on the other side. That would help us to cover a good share of the whole space, and two would do just twice as much as one, and with only half the danger; don’t you see?”

“And where am Oi to come in, thin?” inquired Michael.

“While two of us are going through the woods, the third could circle them, and perhaps he’d run across something that looked like a path. That would be a great help, you see; and if we all arrange to meet out here to-

morrow noon, and report what we've found, we'll soon have the whole thing pretty well in hand."

"What'll we do to-night?" inquired Little Peter.

"We'll have to sleep wherever we find a place. It won't be the first time we've slept on the ground in the woods; and if we could do it when we were out hunting, I'm sure we can do it now."

The plan was agreed to, and soon Little Peter departed to enter the woods on the opposite edge, while it was arranged that Michael should pass around on the outer edge, and Tom should go on alone in the direction in which the three had first started.

Left to himself, Tom grasped his heavy club and pressed sturdily forward. He had no fear of losing his way, for his experience in the woods had taught him how to find his directions, even in the darkest night. Never before, however, had he been on such an errand as that upon which he was engaged now. All that he knew was that it was reported that Giberson had a hiding place somewhere in the stretch of the forest within which he himself then stood; but what it was, or where, he had not the faintest conception.

It was still early in the morning, and the flickering light of the sun, in places, broke through the gloom and cast its reflections upon the thick carpet of leaves which covered the ground. The lad took his bearings, and pushed steadily forward, keeping a careful outlook all the time upon the woods before him. If he made no mistake, he thought, he would arrive at the end towards which he was making his way by the middle of the afternoon. His progress necessarily was slow, and the frequent stops he made to look about him took time; and when the sun seemed to be directly over his head not more than half of the journey had been accomplished.

A little brook ran noisily through the forest directly in front of him, and Tom resolved to stop and eat some of the dinner he had brought with him and obtain a little rest before he entered farther into the woods. Accordingly, after leaning low over the bank and drinking from the clear water, he seated himself on the ground with his back against the trunk of one of the largest trees, and opened the little package of food he had brought with him.

Somehow the feeling of loneliness and the presence of some unseen peril pressed more

heavily upon him. At his feet the brook noisily sped on its way. Before him was the unbroken stretch of the forest, and near the bank was a cluster of bushes, and not far beyond them some evergreens, in the midst of which several tall pine-trees stood. The spot was wild, and not a sign could be discovered that the foot of man had ever trod the ground before he had come. At other times Tom would never have had a thought of danger, but the recent events in Old Monmouth, and the knowledge, or at least the report, that somewhere within the borders of that very forest one of the leaders of the refugees had a hiding place, made him watchful; and as he ate he frequently glanced about him and listened for the sound of an approaching footstep.

How strange it all seemed to him! Only a brief time before, the people of the region had dwelt together in peace. No one had thought of molesting his neighbor, and as for King George, he was looked upon as the rightful and lawful sovereign of them all. But what a change had come since '76! The two brief years had turned the fertile region into battlefields. The conflict near the courthouse had not been all; for while rumors and reports of other battles had come to the

people, the warfare they must themselves wage was of a far different character.

Even the king and the taxes were both to an extent forgotten in the zeal of the people now, for the contest had become one between neighbors. The excuse of the war had roused all the lawless elements in the land, and the death of Little Peter's mother and the hanging of Stephen Edwards were samples rather than conceptions. What would be the end of it all? Washington with his little army was now on the banks of the Hudson, and Sir Henry Clinton and his redcoats were safe behind the defenses of New York. Whig and Tory, patriot and loyalist, refugee and farmer, in Old Monmouth were left to themselves, and must fight their own battles with little expectation of aid from either of the armies.

And Colonel Coward. Would he ever hear of him again? The longing in Tom's heart to learn something of his own kindred became stronger with every passing day. But from present prospects, many a day must pass before he would be free to renew the search or make further investigations of his own, for it was understood that the men who were enrolled in the militia would remain in the service for several months at least. The prospect

of an early release was not very promising, and as Tom Coward looked about him at the great silent forest, and thought of his own condition, his heart was heavy within him, although now that he had entered the service, the lad had no thought of withdrawing.

Hark! What was that? Tom's meditations were suddenly interrupted by a sound which was like that produced by a branch snapping under the foot of a man. Instantly alert, he rose and listened. The sound was repeated, and in addition he could hear the voices of men who evidently were at no pains to be silent.

The startled boy glanced quickly about him, not knowing what to do. The men were approaching from the same direction from which he himself had come. Their voices were plainer now, and in a moment he might be discovered.

The thought served to rouse him to action, and he quickly darted into the clump of bushes and stretched himself upon the ground. The fear that his presence already was known increased his alarm, and with a rapidly beating heart he waited breathlessly for the men to come nearer.

He had not long to wait, for in a few

moments a band of four men came within sight. Tom could see them as he peered out from the bushes, and he crouched lower upon the ground. His heart almost stopped when he recognized Giberson himself in advance, but who were his three companions? Surely one of them was Colonel Tye; but the other two were unknown to him.

Nearer and nearer came the men, and soon Tom could distinguish the words of their conversation. His consternation increased when the men halted only a few feet before him and Giberson turned to his companions and said, —

“We might as well stop here. This is where I live.”

“Where you live?” said one of the men.
“I don’t see any place to live in.”

“You never had any eyes anyway, Bacon. You would n’t see it if I took you into it.”

Tom’s heart gave a great throb as he heard the name spoken. Then Bacon was here too, was he? From the actions of the men he concluded that he had not been seen, and he slightly lifted his head to obtain a glimpse of the man whose name was so well known in all the region.

“Now I’ll get you what I brought you

here for," resumed Giberson. "You wait here and I'll be back in a minute."

The man disappeared, although Tom could not see where he went; but in a few minutes he returned, and handed something to each of the three men. That also could not be seen by the watching lad, but whatever it was it seemed to produce a good feeling in the company, and Bacon said, —

"That's good for you, Giberson. When you come down on my beat, I'll do as much for you."

"That's all right, Bacon," laughed Giberson; "I'll give you a chance to put your words to the test soon." His evident good humor was shared by all, and at his invitation they seated themselves upon the ground.

"Did I tell you about my brush with Huddy's men?" inquired Giberson.

"No. Did n't know you had any brush," said Bacon.

"Did n't much; but I was over here at Falkinberg's, — you know where his tavern is, don't you? Well, I and my mates had gone there, and were sampling his wares, when in comes Ichabod Johnson here, and tells me that eight of Huddy's men had started for me. I only had three men with me; but I



NEARER AND NEARER CAME THE MEN

took them out and hid 'em in the bushes by the road, and when the wagon came up we let drive at 'em. Our arms were n't very steady, for we'd been pretty free with Old Falkinberg's jug, ye see; but if we could n't shoot, we could yell. And the way those fellows went down that hill when we let off two or three of our ear splitters, would have done ye good to see."

"All the men except Colonel Tye joined heartily in the laugh which followed, but the mulatto was silent until the noise ceased, and then he said, "Cap'n Huddy gone to Mannahawkin."

"Is that so, Titus?" inquired Giberson quickly. "How d' ye find out?"

"Saw him. Must get him. Colonel Taylor gib lot of money if we git Captain Huddy now. Mebbe Mistah Edwards gib some too."

"Have they offered as much as the governor is willin' to pay for the top-knot of my friend Ichabod here?" inquired Giberson, slapping the man upon the back as he spoke. "How much is it they value you at?"

"That depends," drawled Ichabod. "If it's in continental money, I'm worth about ten thousan' shillin's; but if it's king's moneys, the price is somethin' like twenty-five pound."

“What makes you so anxious to get Huddy, Tye?” inquired Bacon.

“Stephen Edwards,” replied the man fiercely.

“Steve is dead. He can’t help you, or pay you either.”

“He has help. He the one who tell Tye to be free. He the one make all black men free.”

“No doubt,” said Bacon grimly. “They was n’t his slaves. Perfectly natural for him to want to set other folks’ slaves free. Did n’t cost him anything.”

“Hold on, Bacon,” said Giberson quickly. “We can’t afford to go against Tye; he’s been too good a friend to us. Now what do you want, Tye?”

“Cap’n Huddy.”

“Well, how to get him’s the question. Can’t some o’ ye think it out?”

It was evident that some had suggestions to make, and for a long time they sat and talked over various schemes for capturing the doughty captain of the Monmouth militia. In spite of their desire to get him, their evident fear of him caused plan after plan to be rejected.

At last it was agreed that Ichabod John-

son, who, though well known in the lower part of the State, had slight fear of being recognized in Monmouth, should go to the place where the militia was encamped and strive to learn something of Captain Huddy's plans and movements. When once he had gained the desired information he was to come with his report to Giberson, who would see to it that proper means were provided by which the bold patriot should become their prisoner, and indirectly the reward offered for his capture should also be theirs.

The conference then broke up, and from his hiding place Tom could see that three of the men had gone; but where Giberson was he could not discover. He had heard him say that his house was near, but the manner in which he had referred to it clearly showed that it was not readily seen. Between the thought of the danger which now threatened Captain Huddy and the peril in which he himself was, Tom was in dire straits. He dared not crawl out from the bushes, and yet he was afraid to remain where he then was.

CHAPTER IX

GIBERSON'S NEST

TOM waited until the sun had disappeared below the tops of the trees before he moved from his position in the bushes. Giberson had not been seen, and the lad concluded that doubtless he was sleeping; but still he dared not venture forth from his hiding place.

At last, wearied by his long waiting and stiff in every joint, he slowly crawled out from the bushes. Before he rose to his feet he glanced towards the cluster of evergreens within which he supposed the house of Giberson to be; but as no one was seen and the silence of the forest was unbroken, he stood erect and carefully began to make his way among the trees.

The leaves, thickly strewn upon the ground, prevented his footsteps from being heard, but once or twice, when he stepped upon a fallen branch that snapped beneath his tread, he stopped and peered intently at the place from which he feared the outlaw leader might

come forth. His presence was still unknown, and with a trembling heart and with every nerve in his body tingling with excitement, he carefully made his way from tree to tree, until at last the noise of the brook could no longer be heard and the evergreen trees were all behind him. Then Tom broke into a run, from which he did not cease until a half mile lay between him and the place from which he had fled.

He then stopped and listened intently. Not a sound could be heard. The dusk had deepened, and the tall trees stood grim and silent all about him. Overhead he could see that the clouds were thick and heavy, and that the night gave promise of being dark. Perhaps it might even rain before morning.

He resolutely kept on his way, but soon the darkness became more intense and he could see only a short distance before him. The fear of losing his way became stronger than his fear of the men he had lately seen, and Tom soon decided to wait for the morning before he continued his journey.

A pile of leaves had been driven under a little knoll, whose outlines could be seen in the dim light. It was sheltered from the wind, and too inviting a spot to be passed by.

Accordingly Tom turned and sought its shelter, and stretching himself upon the bed, and covering himself with the leaves, tried to sleep.

It was long before sleep came. The day had been filled with excitement, and it was difficult to banish from his mind the stirring events which had recently occurred. He was satisfied that he had discovered the locality of Giberson's hiding place, although he had not been able to see the house itself. The companions of the man had departed, but they might return, and at the thought Tom lifted his head and listened again. Not a sound disturbed the silence of the gloomy forest about him. He could see only a few yards before him, but nothing to increase his alarm appeared.

Relieved, he once more resumed his position on the bed of leaves, but sleep still would not come. His mind wandered to the arrest of Stephen Edwards. He could now expect no aid from that family in his search for information of the mysterious Colonel Coward. Both Stephen's wife and father looked upon him as one who had led the soldiers to the house on that fatal night. Tom well knew his innocence of any part in that sad affair, but the

feeling of the Edwards family was doubtless natural, and he must wait until events permitted him to explain the circumstances of his visit. Would that time ever come?

Again he thought of the army. Washington now was on the bank of the Hudson and doubtless prepared for the winter. Tom wished that he had been enrolled among the regulars, for in that case he could at least know something of the experiences he must meet. As it was, he was only a member of the Monmouth militia, and all he could do was to add his small services to the efforts of the men to repel the attacks of the marauding bands of outlaws and of the prowling refugees. Surely that was not a very enviable position for one who desired to defend his county, he thought. No such experiences would be his as had come to the sturdy continentals at Trenton and Monmouth Court-House. And now that Tom had enlisted, all the eagerness of his young heart cried out for action.

He glanced above him and could see a star in the sky. There would be no rain that night then, and there was some comfort in that thought. But sleep would not come to the troubled lad. Every sense was alert

and keen, and the knowledge that enemies were not far away kept him watchful. He found himself repeatedly listening for sounds which still were not heard. A gentle wind had arisen, and the leafless branches of the trees moaned and sighed as if they, too, sympathized with the young soldier in his loneliness and fear.

At last, however, the weary lad closed his eyes, and the murmurings of the forest became indistinct and sounded far away and then ceased altogether. When he awoke the straggling beams of the rising sun could be seen here and there among the trees, but all these were ignored in the sense of some approaching danger.

Instantly wide awake, Tom raised himself upon his elbow and listened intently. Surely he had not been deceived, for he could hear footfalls of some one who was approaching. The branches snapped, and whatever it was that was coming was evidently at no pains to walk quietly.

Quickly the lad lay down and strove to cover himself with the leaves, but he had only partly succeeded when he beheld Giberson himself approaching. He was alone, and the careless manner in which he was walking

showed that he had no thought of any one being near. Over his shoulder he carried his heavy rifle, and his every step betrayed the great physical strength which was his.

Tom's face was only partly concealed by the leaves, and as he watched the outlaw leader draw near, it was with an agony of fear lest he should be discovered. Nearer and nearer Giberson approached, and then passed within a few feet of the lad in the leaves, but he did not once glance in that direction, and with a feeling of intense relief Tom saw him soon disappear in the forest beyond. The lad waited until long after the footsteps could no longer be heard, and then rose and shook off the leaves. It had been a close call, but the danger had disappeared, at least for the moment, with the departure of Giberson ; and in the feeling of relief which had come Tom's courage speedily returned.

First he took from his pocket the remains of the food he had brought the preceding day, and then seated himself once more with his back against one of the trees while he ate. Giberson certainly was gone, and with the thought Tom suddenly stopped. Why should he not return now to the cluster of evergreens and make further investigation of the leader's

abode? The man himself would not be there to interfere, and he could search without any fear of being molested.

At the thought Tom hastily finished his scanty breakfast, and then rose and started resolutely back towards the brook. In his eagerness he began to run, and in a few minutes he could hear the noisy waters of the little stream, and soon was once more standing in front of the bushes in which he had been concealed only a few hours before. On his right was the clump of evergreens, and the excited lad at once entered and began his search.

He had only penetrated beyond the outer edge, when he suddenly stopped and peered carefully before him. The inner space had been cleared, but in the centre was a building which instantly revealed to him that he had discovered the object of his search. "Giberson's nest," as the outlaw's abode or hiding place was called, was before him.

It was a conical-shaped structure, not unlike an Indian wigwam in its appearance. It was built of young trees or saplings, whose tops had been drawn together, and branches of cedar trees had been woven into the sides. It differed, however, in one particular from

the typical home of the red man, in that it had a door which had been fitted into a frame. Doubtless this had been brought by Giberson himself, who perhaps had no taste for crawling through a small opening on his hands and knees. The door was closed, and there was no sign that any one was near.

Tom's first impulse was to turn and start at once for the camp, now that he had discovered the place; but as he thought that Giberson was nowhere near, and there was no one to disturb him, he resolved to enter. Perhaps he might discover something of value to Captain Huddy, and as there was small likelihood of danger now, he would do better to complete his work before he turned away.

In spite of his knowledge that Giberson was absent, Tom's heart was beating rapidly as he approached the door of the strange dwelling, and for a moment he even hesitated before he grasped the latch-string. His hesitation lasted but a moment, however, and he quickly took hold of the string; but the door was fast and could not be opened.

Tom was about to throw himself against it and strive to break it down, for in his eagerness now he forgot all caution, and was intent only upon seeking to gain an entrance into

the strange abode. He had drawn back a few paces preparatory to making a rush against the door, when to his consternation the door itself was suddenly opened from within, and a woman stood before him in the doorway.

Too startled by the unexpected sight even to turn away, Tom nevertheless was able to see that she had a gun in her hands, and that she peered out at him with a countenance which expressed no friendly feeling.

Startled as he was, Tom was still more puzzled by the woman's appearance than he was by her threatening attitude. The face was exactly like that of Giberson himself, and had he not seen the man only a brief time before in the forest, he would have declared that the being before him was the leader himself dressed in woman's clothing. As it was, Tom was thoroughly confused. What was the meaning of it all? Were all the leaders of the Tories and refugees accustomed to disguise themselves as Stephen Edwards had done?

His thoughts were instantly recalled by the woman herself, who demanded, "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

The voice was that of a woman, there could be no doubt as to that, Tom thought; but he

was still so puzzled that for a moment he could not find words with which to reply.

"Who are you?" again demanded the woman, cocking the gun in her hands as she spoke.

Tom was unarmed, his stout club being his only weapon of defense, and the attitude of the woman was decidedly threatening.

"I — I — thought this was Bill Giberson's nest," he faltered.

"So it is. Are you the messenger he told me would come this morning?"

"I — I — did n't know he knew I was coming."

"Well, he did. There is n't much going on in Old Monmouth my brother does not know."

Then the woman before him was Giberson's sister. Tom had no difficulty in believing her, for surely such a striking resemblance between two people he never before had seen. Her next words, however, were startling; and great as his perplexity had been, it was soon increased. "You come from Coward, I take it," resumed the woman.

Did she know him? Tom could not think that, for to his certain knowledge never before had he seen her. What then did she

mean? He quickly decided that he must say as little as possible and leave her to do the most of the talking.

"Yes, I come from Coward," he said quickly.

"I believe ye. I'd know ye in the darkest night, for ye have a look jest like the colonel's. Ye might be a relation of his?"

Tom smiled by way of a reply, and the woman continued. "The colonel has n't been down here since after the battle; but I remember him perfectly. Mebbe you're comin' down with him when he comes this time?"

"Which time do you mean?"

"Oh now, don't talk like that to me. You know jest as well as I do what I mean. You're exactly like my brother, you are. You all think a woman don't know much about such things. Bill's glad enough, he is, to have me keep his nest for him, but he's afraid to tell me what he's goin' to do. I jest have to pick it out o' him word by word; I do, for a fact, he's that close-mouthed. But there is n't another man like him in Old Monmouth, now, is there?" she added proudly.

"No, I don't think there is; I never saw one like him."

"That 's what every one of 'em says! Did you ever see such an arm as he has? And as for shootin', there is n't nary one can do what he can with his gun."

"I suppose Bacon and Tye and Ichabod Johnson were here yesterday?" inquired Tom. He had good reason to know they had been there; but the question might serve to increase the belief of the woman that he was one of their followers.

"Here?" she demanded sharply. "Here? In course they were here. They have to come and find out what my brother thinks before they do anything."

"Did they understand about Colonel Coward coming down here?"

"I suppose so. Bill would tell them more 'n he 'd tell me," she replied simply.

"When do they expect him to come?"

"That 's a good one!" laughed the woman. "I reckon you know all about that; and some other folks in Old Monmouth will know more about it than they do now, pretty quick."

"Captain Huddy, for example," suggested Tom, laughing as he spoke.

"You 're right," replied the woman decidedly. "Cap'n Huddy 'll know more in a few days than he does now; or if he don't it

won't be the fault o' my brother. But I suppose you're in a hurry and want that letter. I'll get it for ye," she added, as she turned into the "nest."

Tom's heart was lighter now. He longed to make further inquiries about Colonel Coward, but he dared not, for fear the woman would become suspicious of him. As it was, he was likely to learn some of the secret plans of the refugees, and he must be content for the present with that.

"There ye be," said Giberson's sister, as she returned and handed him a letter.

Tom instantly grasped it, and as he turned to enter the forest he beheld a man approaching. Doubtless it was the true messenger himself, and at the thought Tom started quickly and, dodging behind the "nest," began to run swiftly in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER X

A PRISONER

TOM could hear the voice of the startled woman, and a moment later the sound of breaking branches clearly indicated that he was being pursued. The one glimpse he had obtained of the man had shown that he was armed, and Tom instantly increased his speed, expecting every moment to hear the report of a gun. Leaping over the fallen trees, dodging among the bushes, sometimes tripped by a concealed branch, stumbling, and at times almost falling, Tom sped on. Not even did he stop to listen until at last the sounds of the man behind him could no longer be heard.

Then changing his pace and running more carefully to avoid any step which might betray his presence, the desperate young soldier kept on his way until a half hour had passed, and then he stopped and listened intently.

The great forest stretched out on every side, but a stillness that was oppressive rested

over all. A cawing crow broke suddenly in with his harsh, discordant cry, but that was all. The leafless trees were motionless and the thick layer of colored leaves covered all the ground.

Hark ! Tom suddenly leaned forward and peered eagerly into the forest before him. Surely he could hear the sound of voices of men in conversation. Had his pursuer gained upon him and met Giberson, and were they now returning ? The thought was not a comforting one, and the startled lad knew not what to do. Behind him was the "nest," and before him were the approaching men. He glanced about him seeking for some place of concealment, but quickly checked himself as he heard the words of one of the men.

"Oi'm tellin' yez we won't be after findin' him at all, at all."

It was Michael ; and with a feeling of relief Tom darted forward and soon beheld his recent companions carelessly approaching.

His unexpected appearance, startling as it was at first, was hailed with delight ; but Tom quickly explained his predicament, and with many whispered words on the part of Michael the three began to make their way toward the borders of the forest.

When another half hour had gone and no signs of further pursuit were discovered, Tom turned to Little Peter and said, "Hold on a minute. Let's talk this thing over and see what's best to be done."

Little Peter and Michael stopped obediently, and Tom said, "Now I've got this letter in my pocket which Giberson's sister gave me. I don't know whether I'd better take it back to camp or read it myself here."

"Read it yourself, Tom," said Peter. "It may change our own plans."

Tom took the letter from his pocket and opened it. He read it twice through before he spoke, and then said, "There is n't much of it. Giberson says he'll be back at the 'nest' to-morrow morning, and that he'll then be able to report about Captain Huddy's doings, and send word to Colonel Coward about what will be expected of the refugees."

"Colonel Coward!" exclaimed Little Peter hastily.

"Yes, Colonel Coward," said Tom slowly. "You see, Peter, I'm bound to learn something about him anyway, though I never expected the first word would be from Giberson's 'nest.' But that's neither here nor there. What shall we do? Here they are

plotting against the captain, and then we learn that Giberson is going to be in the 'nest' to-morrow morning."

"We might go back to camp and send over to the captain and get some of the militia to come over here and help us take Bill Giberson."

"I've thought of that, but there won't be time. Captain Huddy ought to be warned, though. If we had a gun here, I should say the best thing would be for you, Peter, to go back to the camp, and for Mike and me to stay here and watch out for Giberson. Of course this messenger may change matters, but he won't be able to get word to Giberson, so when he comes back we can find out something anyway."

"I'll tell you what to do," said Peter quickly. "You and Mike go up to the Osgoods, where Captain Huddy told us to go if we wanted to get help, and perhaps you can find a gun there. Then I'll go back with the message; or, Tom, I'll go with Mike, and you go back to camp."

"That's a good suggestion, Peter. Mike and I'll go up to the Osgoods, and if we can get a gun there, so much the better. It was a big mistake for Captain Huddy to send

us over here unarmed, but we 'll have to make the best of it, I suppose. It must be almost noon now," he added, glancing up at the sun as he spoke, "and we 've no time to lose. Come on, Mike!"

The boys at once departed, Little Peter going towards the camp while Tom and Michael started for the home of Mr. Osgood, a quiet but well-known friend of the patriots' cause. It was several hours later when they entered his house, but the welcome they received was a warm one. Tom related a part of his story, and his host said, —

"I 've only one gun in the place, and that 's nought but a musket. You are welcome to it, though I think you will be better off without it."

"We 'll take it, Mr. Osgood," replied Tom. "We 've got to have something to use."

"I think you would be wiser to go back to the camp and leave Bill Giberson to himself. He 's a desperate fellow."

"All the more reason why we should find out what he 's up to. He 's working with Colonel Tye to take Captain Huddy, and you know as well as I what would become of him if Tye or Giberson once got him. Besides, we 've been ordered to keep on the lookout

for him, and that's what we'll have to do. How is it they don't trouble you more, Mr. Osgood?"

"Because I have n't much left for them to trouble, and besides I live so near the 'nest' that they don't want to make a disturbance here. It would only call attention to the region. That's the reason, I take it, that the most of their attacks are upon people farther up the country."

"Have you ever seen the 'nest'?" inquired Tom.

"No, never. I keep out of the woods altogether, and you would be wise to follow my example."

"We've got to obey orders," replied Tom decidedly. "Captain Huddy sent us here to find all about the 'nest,' and we've just got to do it. I think, Mr. Osgood, if you would get us something to eat and let us lie down for a few hours we'd be in better shape."

"Bless my heart, so you would, so you would."

A simple dinner was prepared for the young soldiers, and then they were shown a room where they could rest. Mr. Osgood promised to remain on guard himself and report at once the approach of any strangers.

It was about four o'clock in the morning when he summoned them, and after a hasty breakfast, and their pockets had been filled with pieces of corn bread which might serve them during the day, the boys thanked their host for his kindness, and with his musket heavily loaded with buckshot they departed.

It was not yet light when they entered the forest, but they could see their way and kept moving steadily forward, Tom carrying the gun and his companion being armed with a club. As the light increased, their anxiety also increased. What had become of his pursuer on the preceding day, Tom of course did not know, and if Giberson should return, as he had declared in his letter he would, he might not come alone, and in that event the peril of this attempt was in no wise lessened.

Tom's plan was to approach as near as possible to the "nest," and then for him and Michael to conceal themselves either high among the branches of the trees or in some cluster of bushes and watch the movements of the refugee. Perhaps they might also be able to overhear some of his words which would disclose his further plans.

At last they approached the spot where the abode was, and Tom halted and peered care-

fully about him for some place of concealment. They were evidently near the path along which Giberson had departed and by which it was natural to suppose he would return. The "nest" itself could not be seen from the place where they had stopped, but Tom knew it was only a short distance before them, and he looked about for some evergreen tree or clump of bushes which might serve their purpose.

Directly in front of him and near the path there was the very tree he desired, and bidding Michael climb up into the branches he watched him until he saw that he was at least partly concealed from the view of any passer-by.

"I'll be over here, Mike," he called in a low voice, pointing to some bushes near by. "Now keep your ears open and your mouth shut, and we'll wait and see what happens."

"Me mouth is shut that tight" —

"Hush, Mike! Keep still!" and Tom hastily withdrew to his own place of concealment, fearful that his companion would not become silent until he was gone.

Creeping within the shelter of the low cedar trees, Tom stretched himself upon the ground and, placing his musket within easy reach,

began what proved to be a long and tedious waiting.

The sun climbed higher, the hours passed, but not a suspicious sound broke in upon the silence of the forest. Not even from the place where the "nest" was, could Tom discern any smoke arising. The waiting became more and more tedious, and at last almost unbearable. Every moment now he almost expected to hear Michael call to him, or see the Irishman dropping from his perch in the tree. Even Tom began to think that Giberson was not to return that day. Perhaps the messenger had found him, and all alike had withdrawn from the "nest" for reasons Tom thought he could readily understand.

At last when it was almost noon, Tom decided that further waiting must be useless. He grasped his gun and prepared to crawl out from his hiding place, when he looked up and beheld Giberson himself approaching.

The pine robber had been walking rapidly and his face was streaming with perspiration; but as he came near the well-known spot his pace slackened, and he stopped for a moment to wipe his brow.

He was standing directly beneath the tree in which Michael was concealed, and Tom

breathlessly watched his companion, fearful that Giberson would look up and discover him, or that Mike would somehow betray his presence.

The man evidently was only going to stop for a moment; but, as he started again, Michael, with a yell that might have been heard far beyond the place where the "nest" was, leaped from the branch on which he had been standing, directly upon the back of Giberson, and before the latter could recover himself bore him to the ground.

Then began such a struggle as the forest never had seen before. Giberson's gun had been flung in the fall far to one side, and his head was driven into the leaves and moss by the weight of the burden which had so suddenly been imposed upon him. Michael was striving desperately to hold him in the position where he had forced him by the fall, but Giberson was striving no less desperately to free himself.

For a moment Tom stood almost speechless with astonishment. The attack had been so sudden and unexpected that he hardly realized what was going on before him. Quickly recalled to the necessity of assisting his friend, he ran swiftly toward the struggling men;

but for a moment he dared not interfere. Over and over upon the leaves the men rolled, each striving desperately to grasp the throat of the other. King George or Washington, congress or parliament, Tory or Whig, were all alike forgotten in that fierce contest.

Strong as Michael was, it soon became evident that Giberson was still stronger. Gradually he was forcing Michael upon his back. The Irishman's face betrayed the intensity of his efforts, but they were unavailing. Tom had stood for a minute near them, afraid of harming Michael if he interfered, so swift were the movements of the men; but as he perceived that Michael was being forced beneath the other, he ran rapidly forward and shouted, —

“Let go of him, Mike. Let go! I've got him!” and, presenting his musket at Giberson, he shouted in his excitement, “You're my prisoner. Get up! Let go of him!”

Giberson glanced up, and apparently for the first time became aware of Tom's presence. For a moment he hesitated; but evidently there was something in the bearing of the youthful soldier which impressed him, for without a word he relaxed his grasp on the prostrate Michael and rose to his feet.

"Get his gun, Mike," said Tom quickly.

"Bedad, and Oi will that," gasped Michael. "First, Oi'll be after givin' him a taste of me shillalah."

"No, no, Mike. Hurry, hurry! We must get out of this before any one comes."

Reluctantly the Irishman yielded, and as soon as the weapon was in his hands Tom said, "Keep the gun, Mike. Now, you march on the other side of him and I'll keep on this, and we'll take this fellow to Captain Huddy."

Giberson scowled, then hesitated, and then with a forced laugh said, "You've got me this time, and no mistake. There's no use in pulling back, I suppose. What are you going to do with me?"

"Give you a chance to tell Captain Huddy about Colonel Coward and the trick you're trying to play," said Tom briefly.

"You're a cool youngster," laughed Giberson.

Apparently he had yielded all, and the elation in Tom's heart was great. Already he was picturing to himself the effect on the men in the camp when he should return with the well-known leader of the refugees. And the best of it all was, that the man was taking

his capture philosophically. He even laughed and chatted as they went on; but Tom was not to be caught napping.

Steadily on they marched until the border of the forest was gained, and then on into the road which led to the camp. Giberson was still docile and had uttered no protests. Doubtless it was the gun which had made him so tractable, Tom thought; but his own elation and that of Michael was not cooled.

They had gone on for a mile in the open road, when Michael suddenly looked up and said, "An' what are those min doin'?"

Tom peered keenly ahead of him for a moment, and then said, "They're some of our men from the camp, I think."

"You're right," said Giberson coolly. "And if I'm not mistaken that's Captain Huddy himself on the right."

Tom again peered intently at the approaching band, and for a moment forgot even the presence of his captive. Giberson, however, was not so forgetful; for with a sudden hard push he sent Tom into the ditch by the roadside, the lad's gun flying off to one side as he fell, and then with a quick leap the prisoner started across the small open field between the road and the adjacent forest.

CHAPTER XI

THE STRUGGLE

THE confusion among the approaching soldiers lasted but a moment. Tom hastily crawled out from the ditch into which Giberson had pushed him, and as he began to look about him for his gun, he shouted to the men who now had rushed forward, "Why don't you shoot? Why don't you chase him? It's Giberson! It's Giberson! He's got away!"

The words of the excited young soldier served to recall the men to the necessity of action; and the uncertainty they had felt when they had first seen the strange actions of Giberson and his companions, not having recognized them in the distance, was speedily banished. Tom by this time had secured his gun, but the flint had fallen from the lock, and the musket could not be discharged.

Meanwhile the refugee had profited by the confusion behind him, and now was within a few yards of the forest. The shout which the men gave when they started in pursuit

served to quicken his flight, and almost before the soldiers had realized what was occurring, he had gained the shelter of the trees and disappeared from sight.

"Take after him!" shouted the excited lad. "He has n't any gun. Mike has his rifle. He can't hurt us! Get him! Get him!"

Now that the men understood who was before them, they needed no second bidding, and spreading out in the form of a semicircle began to search the woods. All through the afternoon the search was continued; but when the shadows of evening began to fall they realized that further efforts would be useless, and dangerous as well, so reluctantly they returned to the road.

The chagrin of Tom Coward was far too strong to find expression in words. It had been his first encounter since the war began, and the elation he had felt over his success in taking Giberson had prepared the way for a corresponding feeling of depression now, when his hopes had been so rudely shattered by the sudden and unlooked-for escape of the refugee. He only partly heard the explanation which Little Peter gave of his return to the camp, and the departure of the half dozen

men, after his information of the discovery of "Giberson's Nest" had been given.

Captain Huddy was not with the men, the refugee's statement having been made simply to divert Tom's attention from his prisoner; and in his present feeling of mortification the lad was glad that the captain was not there.

As the band prepared to return to the camp, Tom said, "I'm not going back, Peter."

"Not going back? Why not?"

"I'm going to stay and see if I can't find out what Giberson will do next. I think I know; but I want to make sure about it."

"It won't be safe, Tom," said Little Peter eagerly. "You can't do anything alone."

"I can try. I never should dare look Captain Huddy in the face again, now. I've just got to do it, and that's all there is to be said."

"Then I'm going with you."

"No, no. You go back with the men. If I don't show up in a day or two then you come and look for me; but don't come alone. You have 't seen Captain Huddy, have you?"

"No, he was n't in the camp. You know he went away two or three days ago."

"Well, you must see him and tell him what the pine robbers are planning to do

against him. Tell him what I heard Bacon and Tye and the rest of them say. He ought to be told, and you're the one to tell him."

Little Peter yielded reluctantly, and then only after Tom had promised that Michael should be permitted to return with him. The matter was soon arranged, and Tom and Michael quietly withdrew from their fellows and soon were in the forest in which "Giberson's nest" was concealed.

Tom was satisfied that the refugee would return to his abode, and perhaps was there even now. His great haste that morning, and the fact that he apparently had not received or given the word for which his sister had been waiting, — though what had become of the messenger for whom Tom had been mistaken by the woman the lad could not conjecture, — led the young soldier to believe that something would be learned of the refugee leader near his strange abode. Doubtless Giberson would not long remain there after his recent adventure, and a visit to the place would be attended by increased danger; but Tom's heart was hot within him now, and his feeling of mortification was still too keen to be ignored.

Perhaps it was not pure patriotism only

which moved the lad, but in the presence of the perils with which the good people of Old Monmouth were then beset there was no time in which to stop and analyze motives. Captain Huddy, the most hardy patriot of them all, was in peril of his life, and the leaders of the evil bands were, or had been, in consultation with Giberson in his "nest." Something must be done, though it was with no clearly defined plan in his mind that Tom and his companion once more entered the forest when darkness had fallen over the land.

They had not advanced far within the shadows before it was evident that they must wait for the morning before they proceeded with their somewhat misty purpose. A sheltered spot was accordingly found, and once more Tom prepared to pass the night in a bed of leaves. The hardship was, however, all forgotten in the thought of the danger which surrounded them. Giberson now would be on the lookout for the approach of his enemies, and the enterprise was consequently fraught with greater peril than the previous one in which he had been engaged. Michael's heavy breathing soon showed that he at least had become unmindful of his surroundings, but Tom did not sleep much that night.

With the first appearance of the dawn he roused the slumbering Michael, and while making a hasty breakfast on the little food they still had in their pockets, they talked over the plans for the task immediately before them.

"I think, Mike," said Tom at last, "we'd better separate. You keep your gun and go around to the other side of the brook and come up to the 'nest' on the west, and I'll keep on this way and come up on this side. We'll have to watch and see whether Giberson's there or not. I wish we could get him again! But I don't expect any such good luck as that."

"If ye'd only been after keepin' still whin Oi was jist goin' to give Bill Giberson a taste o' me shillalah, we'd be havin' no such trouble as this at all, at all," said Michael reproachfully. "Now, me lad, whin I git that same Giberson this time, wid his head in the moss, tryin' to see down to China or some other heathen town, ye jist put a Patrick lock on the two jaws o' yez, and Oi'll be after havin' it all fixed in no time at all."

"Put a what on my jaws?"

"A Patrick lock, that's what I was tellin' yez."

“What’s a Patrick lock?”

“Some people calls ’em paddy locks, but that’s a reflection on me feyther’s name, it is that. I niver say Paddy. It’s Patrick the name is, and it’s that same lock I’d be after havin’ yez put on yer two lips.”

Michael was evidently in earnest, and far too much in earnest himself to stop now to set his companion right, Tom rose and at once prepared to depart, an example which Michael speedily followed. With many loudly whispered words as to “Patrick locks” and “shillalahs,” one of the latter of which Michael carried along with Giberson’s rifle, the good-natured Irishman turned into the forest, and as soon as he disappeared Tom himself, after looking carefully to the flint in his gun, started towards Giberson’s “nest,” which lay not more than three miles away.

Stealthily in the increasing light the lad moved on, frequently stopping behind some tree and carefully peering about him before he proceeded. In this manner he steadily advanced; and when at last the sun could be seen above the tops of the trees, he knew that he was within a few rods of Giberson’s strange abode, and the testing time had come.

He was breathing hard in his excitement,

and the fear that Giberson might have friends with him if he was in the "nest" increased Tom's alarm. He knew that he would receive no mercy if he should be taken, and for a moment he almost wished he had not come. The feeling was quickly banished, however; and as the determined lad, more resolved than ever to discover what had become of the refugee, prepared to advance once more, he was alarmed by what sounded very like the click of a gun-lock behind him.

The startled boy glanced up and beheld Giberson himself only a few yards from him. The refugee was standing with his back to a tree and, all unsuspected by Tom, had brought his gun to his shoulder, and the first knowledge the lad had had of his presence was the click of the gun when Giberson cocked it.

It had not taken Tom long, however, to discover his peril. The first startled glimpse he had, had shown him that Giberson was about to fire, and instantly Tom dropped to the ground. As he fell the gun was discharged, and Tom felt his hat lifted from his head. It was a new beaver hat, and one for which he had been working during the two recent winters. He had trapped the foxes and muskrats until he had obtained a suf-

ficient number of skins to take to Monmouth court-house, and there exchange them for the hat which he had worn with so much pride when he had joined the militia.

There were no thoughts in his mind of the value of his head-gear when he fell to the ground and heard the whistle of the bullet which lifted the treasured hat from his head. He realized that he had somehow marvelously escaped the bullet of the refugee, but there also instantly came to him the knowledge that he, too, must act, for Giberson quickly started forward, evidently thinking the lad had fallen a victim to his shot.

As he approached, Tom instantly rose and, bringing his own gun to his shoulder, fired directly at the approaching man.

With a groan Giberson fell; and for a moment, aghast at his own work, Tom stopped and looked at the fallen refugee. He quickly perceived that he was not dead, but as he was now harmless he hastily approached him.

"You've fixed me now, lad," said Giberson quietly. "I'll not shoot any more."

"Where are you hurt?" inquired Tom, stopping to load his gun again before he came nearer. He had had one lesson of Giberson's tricks and desired no more.



THE FALLEN REFUGEE

"It's my leg. What were you loaded with? Buckshot?"

"Yes."

"I've got it all in my left leg. You've broken it, I think. Come and help me."

"An' what's all this about?"

Tom looked up quickly and saw Michael approaching. "Giberson's hit," he replied, "and he wants me to help him. You keep watch, Mike, while I see."

"Kape watch, is it?" exclaimed Michael. "Do yez see that?" he added, grasping his club and shaking it before the apparently helpless man. "Well, thin, kape still, or yez'll be after knowin' how a shillalah tastes."

Tom feeling safe, now that his companion was with him again, advanced and carefully examined the wounded leg. "I don't know, but I think it's broken," he said at last.

"I know it is," replied Giberson quietly. "Now go to the 'nest' and tell Debby to come and help. Go on, she's all alone," he added as Tom hesitated. "Why, here she is now," and as he spoke his sister ran quickly to the place where her brother was lying.

Under other circumstances Tom would have been moved by the display of affection she bestowed upon the wounded man. And Gib-

erson himself was not unmoved by the sight, as he directed her what to do, and soon she had the leg neatly bandaged. Tom and Michael had rendered such assistance as lay within their power, and when at last Debby Giberson had done her best, she said, "Now help me carry him into the house."

"We're going to carry him to the camp, not to the house," said Tom quietly.

"Oh, surely you will not do that!" exclaimed the woman. "He's wounded! He'll die! He never can do it! Leave him here with me. He can't get away. He could n't if he tried. Oh, leave him here! Don't take him away! Don't, I beg of you not to!"

Tom hesitated. He was strongly moved by the tears and pleadings of the woman, and at last said: "Mike, you go back to the camp and get some men to come with a stretcher, and I'll wait here."

Giberson was carried into the nest and Michael speedily departed to summon the desired aid. To Tom's surprise Giberson took his misfortune in good part, and in spite of his intense suffering even laughed and joked with the lad. The long morning wore away, and Tom's anxiety steadily increased. He was fearful every moment that some of the

other refugees might come, nor did he trust Giberson's assertion that they would not.

His fears were relieved when about three o'clock in the afternoon five men arrived with Michael, and preparations were at once made to carry the wounded prisoner to the camp. Debby's pleadings now were unheeded, and at last her brother quietly bade her be silent, as there was no escape from the results of his own misfortune.

The woman was left alone to find her way out of the forest as best she could ; the " nest " was demolished, and then the little procession, with the wounded man carried on a rude stretcher, began their march.

Great was the rejoicing in the camp when the men returned, and many were the words of praise for Tom Coward. Giberson's wound was dressed, and in a few days he was sent forward to the county jail for safe keeping, and to await the sentence which the angry Whigs might pass upon him.

After his departure Tom Coward began to think more and more of Giberson's dealings with the mysterious Colonel Coward. He had not mentioned the name to the prisoner while he had been in the camp, but now that he was gone Tom's eagerness to ask him

questions increased; and somehow he believed that Giberson could and would give him some information.

At last, when three weeks had passed, Tom obtained permission to leave the camp at Toms River and go to Mannahawkin, where he hoped to obtain a permit from Captain Huddy which would give him an entrance into the old jail, and perhaps enable him to learn something from the prisoner concerning the man with the same unfortunate name as his own.

CHAPTER XII

THE SPIRIT OF OLD MONMOUTH

UPON his arrival at the camp Tom at once sought out Captain Huddy, and while he was cordially welcomed by the stern old patriot, he was told that he must wait until evening for the interview he desired. Accordingly, he spent the intervening time walking about the camp, talking with the men and observing their movements.

The life of the militia at Mannahawkin did not differ materially from that at Toms River. Some of the men wore the homely, home-dyed garments which had procured for the soldiers the name of the Jersey Blues; but others were clad in the garments such as they had worn in their labors on the farms. They were a sturdy, determined band, only about forty in number; and the stories they had to relate of their deeds were not unlike those which other similar bands had to tell. Midnight raids, incursions of the sailors from the British vessels, attempts to burn the salt

works or to capture some patriot leaders, were the main features of the war.

The struggle was not much like that which had occurred between the two armies in the preceding year, but it was no less a struggle, and as a test of patriotism not one whit behind in its demands upon the men of Old Monmouth. Few, indeed, were the settlers who had not already in some form been drawn into the desperate contest. Families were so divided that not infrequently brothers were on opposite sides. Desertions to the British were frequent, but only served to increase the zeal of those who remained; and not the least of the stories of heroic deeds were those of the women who were left to till the fields and defend their homes as best they could.

After supper Tom went to the little hut in which Captain Huddy was staying, and was at once received by the leader himself.

"I was sorry not to be able to listen to your story this afternoon, my lad," said the captain; "but some stirring measures were being planned and I could not delay. Now I will hear what you have to say."

Tom had seated himself in the rude chair which the captain had bidden him take, and

at once related the story of the capture of Giberson, dwelling especially upon the words of Captain Tye and Bacon, which he had overheard as they talked of their plans for taking Captain Huddy.

The old soldier listened attentively, and made no comment until Tom had finished; then he said, "As far as I'm concerned, my lad, you need feel no alarm. I have known that the villains were after me for a long time; but they have n't got me yet, and what's more, it's one thing to tell how they're going to capture me, and another thing to take me."

"But this hanging of Stephen Edwards has made things worse. They think the red-coats in New York will give a big reward for you now, for they think you had something to do with his death."

"They're not mistaken," said the captain quietly. "I helped haul the rope that sent the spy into eternity; and what's more, I'd do it over again if it was necessary. In fact, I'd like to help serve those rascals in the same way."

The captain spoke in a low, deep voice, and the strength of his own convictions as to the righteousness of the struggle in which he

was engaged could not be doubted, but Tom could not repress the shudder which crept over him at the words. He had not yet recovered entirely from the effect of the shot he himself had fired at Giberson. It had been the first time in his life when he had ever offered violence to another man, and while in a way he knew that he had done right, still the effect of it upon himself had not been slight.

“Your story interests me,” resumed the captain; “not only because I am glad that Giberson is now where he can do no more harm, and will have to answer the demands of justice, but because it has put you where you belong, my boy. It has shown you, as well as me, that this war is no light matter, and the harder we fight the sooner it will be ended.”

As Tom still made no reply the captain went on, apparently as much in soliloquy as to talk to his young visitor. “It’s all in the line of our heritage. The very blood in our veins comes to us from men and women who would rather have died than have suffered from tyranny.”

“But, Captain Huddy,” interrupted Tom, “Lieutenant Gordon told me last summer

that he thought the most of the English people really sympathized in their hearts with the colonies, and that all the trouble came because the king listened to such men as Lord North, and not to William Pitt and others like him."

"It may be so," replied the captain sternly; "but that does n't alter the case one whit. Why don't they stop the king and North? Old Oliver Cromwell and some of his ilk found a way to keep back even the king from going too far. Their sympathy does n't prevent our homes from being burned, or our wives and children from being murdered, does it? My own wife and children are in heaven, and I have n't a soul that would mourn me dead. But that only rouses me the more to do what little I can for the children and wives of my suffering neighbors. No, my lad, my own death would mean little to any living soul; but my life may mean something, and, by God's help, I mean that it shall."

"I don't know that I have a father or a brother or sister in the world, either," said Tom in a low voice. "I only know that I have no mother."

"Your case, my boy," said the captain more gently, "is not unlike my own; but it

only goes to show that you must keep on as you've begun. If you and I have less to lose by our death, we've more to gain by our lives, and we must make them count. Old Monmouth will never give up! Never!"

Both were silent for a moment, the captain evidently strongly moved, and Tom perhaps sharing no less in the deep feeling of the patriot leader.

"Tom, let me tell you something about Old Monmouth, for the life you see now is only the outcome of what she has had from the very beginning. When the white men first came to this country, even the Indians showed the spirit that seems to come with the very air we breathe. The tradition among the Turtles was, that one day some of their warriors who were out fishing, paddled home in great haste to report that a great white object had been seen coming over the water toward the shore. The tribes speedily assembled, and soon they all could see the strange something coming. Men were moving about in it, and one was all dressed in red; that was probably Sir Henry Hudson. He was the Manitto himself, come to visit them, the red men concluded. The warriors on the shore arranged a dance, their conjurers

were ready to receive the Great Spirit, a feast was prepared, and all in great eagerness awaited the coming of the one who would bless or blight them.

“Soon the great object with its white wings halted, a boat came ashore in which was the man dressed in red, the Manitto himself, and as they landed they made signs of peace, though their words could not be understood. The chief, who probably was the good Uarni himself, with his wise men, formed a circle, and the Manitto and two attendants advanced within it. Then the man dressed in red took a large houck-hack, or gourd, which he had brought with him, and from it poured into a little cup some strange-smelling liquid which he handed the chief. The chief took it, smelled of it, and then passed it to the wise men. It went from hand to hand until it came back to the chief himself, and then the stranger made signs that he should drink it. The chief hesitated, then rose and called his wives and children, bade them farewell and drank the contents.

“The eyes of all the assembly were now fixed upon their chief. Soon he began to stagger. His eyes rolled, and he fell to the ground, and all the tribe began to lament and

bewail. In a little while the chief recovered. He sat up and told his people of what he had seen and experienced. That was the beginning of what proved to be a lasting blight and shame to all the Indians ; but the bravery of the old chief who first drank the poison, and thought it was the means the Manitto had used to summon him from this world, was seen when without a murmur he met what he supposed was to be the end of his life. That spirit, though I trust in another form, has ever been the controlling motive, not only of the Indians, but of all the people who have ever lived in Old Monmouth.

“ Then, too, the very woman to whom the first settlement of this entire region was largely due, and from whom I am glad to claim descent, displayed a spirit broader and braver even than that of the Indian who thought he was going to die at the command of the Manitto. She was Penelope Stout, though that was not her name when she first came here. She was a young Dutch woman, and married, though no one knows what the name of her husband at that time really was, for Stout, you see, was the name of the man she afterwards married. We know that her father’s name was Vanprincis, and that she

was born in Amsterdam about the year 1602. She and her first husband sailed for New York, or New Amsterdam, as the Dutchmen there called the settlement, somewhere about 1620, but the vessel was stranded near Sandy Hook. The crew got ashore and started straight for New York, but Penelope's husband was hurt in the wreck and she refused to leave him. They were landed on this shore, and hid in the woods; but they had n't been there long before the Indians made a rush on them and killed them both, as they supposed, though it afterwards turned out only her husband was dead.

“But Penelope, though her skull was fractured and her shoulder so hacked that she never was able to use her left arm again, and was so cut by the savages that some of her vitals appeared, was n't dead. She was there in the woods for seven days, hiding most of the time in a hollow tree, and eating the little branches that were near her. On the seventh day she saw a deer run past her with a lot of arrows sticking in its flank, and she knew some Indians were not far away. Pretty soon two of them came up, and the poor woman made motions, begging them to hit her on the head and put her out of her misery.

“The younger Indian was just about to do that, for I suppose the poor creature must have presented a fearful sight; but the other Indian, who happened to be an older man, prevented his companion from killing her. He threw his match coat about her and carried her in his arms to his wigwam, and there he nursed and cared for her. When she was so that she could travel, he carried her to New Amsterdam, expecting an ‘Indian present,’ which, as you know, was usually about twice as much as he himself gave.

“He got his present, though, and not long afterwards Penelope married a man by the name of Richard Stout. He was an Englishman about twice her age, but he was a sterling fellow and made her a good husband. It was at her earnest request that her husband Richard and some of his good Dutch neighbors came over here occasionally, and they were so well pleased with the land which Henry Hudson, away back on the second day in September, 1609, had described in his entry in his log-book as — ‘This is a very good land to fall in with, and a pleasant land to see’ — that about 1648 Richard Stout and four or five other families settled here. But of course they did n’t stay long, as you know,

for war broke out between the Dutch and English, and I believe a small Dutch fleet was sent over here off our shore, or that of Staten Island, I don't know which.

"The Dutch who had really given up, again held sway over New York, New Jersey, and along the Delaware; but they didn't hold it long, for a treaty was made in which they gave up all the territory to the English."

"What became of the poor woman — Penelope Stout?" inquired Tom.

"She bore her husband seven sons and three daughters. She lived to be one hundred and ten years old, and in the eighty-eight years of her life after she married Richard Stout she saw her offspring multiplied until they numbered five hundred and two. It was n't of that I was thinking, but rather of the marvelous spirit which she displayed and which kept her alive for seven days, refusing to give up even when she had been so terribly wounded. And the spirit of the first white woman in Old Monmouth is the same spirit which is here to-day. Her descendants, and those of the Rhode Island people who came here soon after, to say nothing of that of the men who came from

old England, — for she was a nobler country in those days, — simply will not give up. They can't give up, for they don't know how. I could go on to tell you of other women as brave as Penelope Stout, but I'm not thinking of the spirit which has been, but of that which is now, and of the cause of it."

"It's as strong as ever it was," said Tom eagerly, for he had been fired by the enthusiasm of the stern old fighter before him.

"Yes, it's as strong as ever it was," repeated the captain solemnly.

"But I wanted to see Giberson," began Tom again. "He'd been having some dealings with this Colonel Coward in New York I told you about. Giberson took his capture good-naturedly, and it may be that he would be willing to tell me what he knew of the man."

"I should n't see him if I were you, but as you are not I, I presume you'll do as you please. I'll give you the permit, but don't let him take advantage of you, my lad. He's a desperate man, you must remember."

Tom promised to be on his guard, and receiving the desired permit withdrew from Captain Huddy's presence. On the following morning, riding the horse which the

captain had kindly loaned him, he set forth for the county jail, and not long afterwards drew rein before it. Hastily dismounting, he tied his horse to the rail which had been placed in the street in front of the building, and with his desired permit in his hand at once entered.

The keeper read the missive, and then telling the lad to follow him led the way to one of the cells. Opening the door, he permitted Tom to enter, and then telling him he would be back in a few minutes turned away.

In the corner of the narrow little room sat a person who had not once looked up since Tom had entered. When the jailer departed the inmate glanced up, and for a moment Tom could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes. Instead of Giberson he beheld Giberson's sister Debby, who looked up at him with eyes that were beaming and a face that could not conceal the pride she felt at that moment.

CHAPTER XIII

THE STRANGER IN THE CELL

“WHAT are you doing here?” Tom exclaimed, as soon as he perceived that it was Giberson’s sister and not the outlaw before him. “I don’t understand. Where is your brother? Where’s Giberson?”

“He’s in New York by this time, I hope,” said Debby exultingly.

“In New York! How does it happen that he’s there and you are here?”

“Nothing easier to explain than that. He walked out of the jail yesterday afternoon.”

“Walked out of the jail? How could he do that? I don’t understand you.”

“I came to visit him yesterday afternoon, but he went away in my place and I stayed in his. Nothing could be more simple than that, I’m sure.”

“But I don’t understand,” repeated Tom. “How could he go out in your place and you stay in his?”

“Why, he wore my dress and I put on his clothes.”

For a moment Tom could say nothing. The striking resemblance between Debby and her brother he already knew, and the similarity between their faces now impressed him more forcibly than ever before. The boldness of the attempt, the success which had attended it, and, above all, the pride which the woman felt and which she was now at no pains to conceal, had made the lad almost speechless in his astonishment.

"I wasn't going to let the rebels hang my brother the way they did poor Stephen Edwards," said Debby. "He's the only brother I've got, and is too brave and good a man ever to be treated like that."

"He must have had help," said Tom, at last recovering somewhat from his astonishment. "His leg was broken and he could n't have got away alone."

"Perhaps he didn't go alone," replied Debby. She had not risen from the corner of the cell in which she had been seated when Tom first entered, but her face was turned towards him now, and the expression of defiance upon it was more than he could bear.

Turning quickly, he shook the door of the cell which the jailer had locked behind him

when Tom had crossed the threshold. Again and again he shook it with all his strength and called aloud for the keeper.

"That won't do any good," said Debby tauntingly. "Bill's gone."

Once more Tom rattled the door and shouted and called for the jailer to come. This time his efforts were rewarded with success, and in a few moments the man came running through the corridor, his excitement expressing itself by the looks of alarm he cast about him.

"Here! Here! Open the door!" shouted Tom. "Quick! Open it! open it!"

"What's all this trouble about?" demanded the man, as he halted before the cell. "What's wrong?"

"Open the door and you'll see soon enough," replied Tom eagerly.

The keeper took one of his keys, but for a moment his trembling hands seemed unable to find the lock. When at last he succeeded, and flinging open the door stepped hurriedly into the cell, he glanced from Tom to the prisoner as if he could not understand what all the confusion meant.

"There! Look there, will you?" demanded Tom. "Where's your prisoner?"

“Prisoner?” repeated the jailer. “What do you mean? You can see as well as I can.”

“Where’s Giberson?”

“Look for yourself!” retorted the keeper, angry now at what seemed to be the impudence of the young soldier. “He’s right here before your own eyes.”

“That’s no more Giberson than I am,” replied Tom. “What’s become of him? Where is he?”

The startled keeper glanced again searchingly at the prisoner, and an exclamation broke from his lips. Approaching near, he peered intently into Debby’s face, and then said slowly, “I swan!”

“You’ll never hang Billy now!” exclaimed Debby gleefully, still remaining seated in the corner from which she had not moved. “You’ll never treat him as you did poor Stephen Edwards. You can hang me if you want to hang a woman, but my brother Bill is in New York now, and you’ll never get him! Never!”

Debby’s air of confidence seemed to arouse the anger of the keeper, and turning sharply to Tom he said, “Come out of this! We’ll leave the wench here and attend to her later.”

Tom followed the chagrined jailer out of the cell, and as soon as the door had been carefully locked they started for the front of the building.

"You'll never hang my brother now!" called Debby after them gleefully. "He's got away! He's safe with Sir Henry Clinton in New York! You can't treat him as you did poor Stephen Edwards!"

A smothered exclamation of anger escaped the jailer's lips, but he made no other reply, and as soon as they had gained the outer door he turned to Tom and said abruptly, "Tell me about it!"

Tom readily explained what Debby had told him, but before his story was ended the man had called for the guard, and giving a few hasty directions had sent searching parties out in every direction.

"They won't get him," he said to Tom when the men had departed. "The jade spoke truly, and I am the one to be blamed."

As Tom glanced questioninglly at him, he continued: "The woman came here yesterday about half past four o'clock in the afternoon. She drove up in front of the jail and tied her horse to the rail. Then she came in, and began to plead with me to let her see her

brother. I ought not to have listened, but she took on so that I just had to, so I let her into his cell and told her I'd leave her there just ten minutes. When I came back, there she was, and everything seemed to be all right except that she was sobbing and taking on hard. I confess I felt sorry for her, and I even went out and helped her into the wagon."

Tom could not check the smile that came to his face at the picture that arose before him of the jailer tenderly assisting the escaping prisoner into the wagon, and as the man saw it he said bitterly, "You can laugh if you want to, but I can tell you it's no laughing matter to me. It'll cost me my place."

"Did n't you see his face?"

"No, I don't think I did. He pretended to be sobbing, you see, and covered it with his handkerchief; but probably I should n't have suspected anything if I had, for I never saw two people look more alike in all my life. Did you?"

"No, I never did. Her face startled me the first time I saw it."

"It well might. There's only one consolation in the whole matter, and that is there are n't two such people in Old Monmouth as

Bill Giberson and his sister, and I know what I'm talking about, too."

"And one of them is n't in Old Monmouth now, if Debby's words are to be believed."

"No. That's the worst of it, the jade!" exclaimed the jailer, all his feeling of anger and mortification instantly returning. "Still it's something that it takes two such people as they are to outwit one. I never saw such a man as Bill Giberson. Why, three years ago I saw him one day take a hop, skip, and a jump and clear an Egg Harbor wagon! Yes, sir, he went straight over it and never once touched it with his heels. And as for running, why there never was a redskin in Jersey that could come anywhere near him. And his sister is n't far behind him either. The same day when I saw Bill clear the wagon, I saw her stand in one hogshead and without touching her hands to the sides jump straight out of it into another one that had been placed near it. They're a pair, they are! And to think that we had the fellow right here in our hands, and that now he's got away, and that jade is upstairs laughing at us! 'T would serve her right if she was strung up by a halter and left out here on one of the trees to take her brother's place!

The long afternoon passed, and at nightfall the searching guards returned, but without the missing prisoner. Not a clue of him had been discovered, and the only information they had obtained, which in any way seemed to be connected with his escape, was the word they brought that Bacon and Colonel Tye had been seen by some of the women of the region in the preceding afternoon riding swiftly on horseback in the direction of the jail.

"That settles it!" said the jailer when he heard their report. "If Bacon and the mulatto have been seen around here, it means that Giberson has had good help, and we'll not see him again soon."

"What'll be done with Debby?" inquired Tom.

"Oh, Debby'll be taken care of. Don't be alarmed about her," said the man angrily. "What I want is Debby's brother; but if I can't get him, I'll try to put up with his next of kin. Debby'll be well looked to, you can rest easy about that."

The news of Giberson's escape, and the part his devoted sister had taken in bringing it to pass, were soon known by all the people in the little hamlet, and great was the excitement

which followed. Naturally the fears were increased when it was learned that Bacon and Colonel Tye had been seen in the neighborhood; and that night it could be safely said that few slept soundly. Even the double bars which were thrown across the doors of the rude little houses seemed a slight protection. With these leaders of the refugees near, it was but natural to infer that their followers were not far distant; and in the constant dread of an attack, the few members of the militia who were doing duty as guard for the county jail were looked upon as being but a slight defense.

Tom Coward had remained through the night, both because it would be safer for him to do so, and because the jailer himself had urged him to stay. But early on the following morning he prepared to depart. The anxious man had repeatedly urged Tom to explain the escape to Captain Huddy in its true light, and to try to show that it was something for which he himself was not to be blamed too harshly.

The lad readily consented; and although he knew his influence would be slight with the stern old warrior, he could not find it in his heart to blame the jailer, keen as his own

disappointment at Giberson's escape was. The resemblance between the brother and sister was so marked that the mistake had been a natural one. What Captain Huddy would do, however, he could not conjecture.

He was riding swiftly forward, his thoughts busy with the recent excitement, and occasionally thinking of what was going on in the camp at Toms River. So many things had been feared, and indeed expected, that it was more than likely he would hear of events upon his return as exciting as his own recent experiences had been.

He was approaching a well-known spot by the roadside. A spring bubbled forth out of the earth, and the water ran in a little stream, following the course of the road for a few yards and then disappearing in the woods.

The wind was keen and biting, and as it whistled among the leafless branches of the trees it almost seemed to sound a note of warning. And Tom's heart was in a mood to respond to his surroundings. The man whom he had aided in capturing had escaped, and, safe among the soldiers of Sir Henry Clinton in New York, would be free to carry out his evil designs against his old neighbors and friends, if he had ever been so fortunate

as to have any of the latter in Old Monmouth. And then, too, all his hopes of learning something about the mysterious Colonel Coward were again shattered. The longing in Tom's heart to know something of his kindred had become more and more intense. The lonely years he had spent in Benzeor's home had increased the desire until, although it had not abated his zeal in the service of the militia, it had nevertheless become almost as strong as that.

Tom guided his horse to the spring and, permitting the bridle to hang loose in his hands, leaned forward and watched the thirsty beast as he drank the cool water. For several minutes he remained in that attitude, and then an undefined feeling of fear came over him. He sat erect and turned partly about in his seat, and there, on the opposite side of the road, beheld Colonel Tye calmly regarding him. How long he had been there Tom did not know. The mulatto had not spoken, and when he perceived that his presence had been discovered, a broad grin spread over his face. A rifle was in his hands, but he showed no disposition to be belligerent.

For a brief time neither spoke. Doubtless Tom's face betrayed his alarm, and it seemed

to increase the amusement of Titus, for the broad grin became broader. Still he did not speak, though his eyes were not turned away even for a moment.

"Is that you, Tye?" faltered Tom at last, unable to endure the suspense longer.

Tye nodded his head by way of a reply, and the grin seemed to become even more pronounced.

"I heard you were here." Tom was becoming a little bolder now. "Did you get Bill Giberson safely out of Old Monmouth?"

"Sister tell you?" laughed Tye.

"Yes, — no, — that is, she did n't tell me; but I heard it."

"Debby great woman. Giberson proud of her. He not mad at you."

"He ought to be."

"Ha! ha! No, sah. He think it good joke to be caught by a brat. He say 'brat,' that just what he say."

In spite of his alarm Tom's face flushed, and the laugh of Colonel Tye broke forth afresh. Suddenly his manner changed, and he said abruptly, "You see Cap'n Huddy? You tell Cap'n Huddy, Stephen Edwards dead, and Cap'n Huddy goin' die same way, on same tree."

A shudder crept over the lad at the words. The mulatto's face had no grin upon it now, and he clutched his gun in a manner which did not tend to relieve Tom's fears.

Suddenly Tye's manner again changed abruptly, and he said, "How you like being soldier?"

"How did you know I was a soldier?"

"Ha! ha! Tye know, and Giberson know too."

"Tye," said Tom, ignoring even his own danger for the moment, "I want to ask you a question."

The mulatto glanced up keenly but made no reply.

"Do you know Colonel Coward?"

The effect of the question startled even Tom himself. Colonel Tye looked at him in astonishment for a moment; and then, without a word, turned and dashed into the woods. The branches that snapped beneath his feet could be heard, and it was evident that the man was in great haste. Soon, however, the noise ceased, and the silence of the forest was once more unbroken.

CHAPTER XIV

BACK TO THE CAMP

COLONEL TYE's unexpected departure Tom in no way connected with the question he had asked, and for a moment he glanced uneasily about him, fearful of discovering some new cause of alarm; but no living creature could be discerned among the trees of the forest. The rough road stretched away in the distance, the tree-tops nodded together, and the branches swayed before the wind, but as far as he could see there was nothing to explain the sudden movement of the mulatto. However, there was no time in which to make further investigations, and grasping the bridle rein tightly and speaking to his horse, Tom sped over the road toward the camp at Manahawkin.

No interruption occurred, nor was any one seen by the lad before he drew near the quarters of the militia. Once there he hastily cared for the horse he had ridden, and then went to make his report to Captain Huddy.

That officer received him in his usual quiet manner, and listened attentively to the story Tom had to tell of Giberson's escape from the jail and the manner in which it had been effected. Even then he made no comment, and Tom went on to describe his meeting with the ex-slave Titus, and the threats he had made against the captain's life, which the lad could not easily forget or lightly turn aside.

"You may let your heart rest easy about me," said Captain Huddy at last, when the story had all been told. "If my time has come, nothing I can do will prevent it from coming; and if not, nothing these villains can do will accomplish their purpose. I am in the hands of a higher power than that of Bacon or any negro slave he can muster in Old Monmouth."

"But, Captain Huddy," protested Tom, who was far from sharing in the fatalistic views of the leader of the militia, "you can do something to protect yourself, or at least you can keep out of their way."

"I shall go on as I have begun, my lad," replied the captain solemnly. "In the line of my duty I shall not fear. Right is right, and it must prevail. I know better than you

how bitter this struggle has become. John Burgoyne foretold, before he started for America, that in less than three months after his arrival the rebellion would be crushed, and he would be dancing with the ladies of this country at the balls to be held in honor of King George III.; but somehow he was not a true prophet. Henry Clinton made similar boasts, but after the fight last summer here in Old Monmouth he somehow sticks very closely to his quarters in New York. Look at it, my boy. The only places in this country the British hold now are New York and Newport, and parts of Staten Island and Long Island. The French have come over to aid us, and the prospect never was so promising as it is now that in the end we shall win. We must win and we shall! The cause is righteous, and righteousness must prevail. 'I have never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.' "

The face of the old warrior seemed to glow with a strange light, and Tom was too much impressed to make any reply. Surely, he thought, the leader of the militia in that part of New Jersey had no slight conception of the nature of the struggle they were engaged in. If all only felt like that, the final outcome

could not be in doubt. But Tom, for his part, had no such feeling of confidence.

"I know," resumed the captain after a brief silence, "that all do not share in my convictions, but they ought to, and that is one reason why I have been so active in seeking to enlist the aid of the young men. You have done well, my boy, but you will see things worse before they are better. Our oppressors are naturally more and more bitter as they find themselves foiled in every attempt to subdue us, and as I said, it is but natural for us to expect that their efforts now will be harsher and worse than any they have used before. Indeed, I have just heard of two deeds that show the truth of what I have been telling you, and which make my blood boil when I think of them."

Tom's question was not expressed in words, but his looks betrayed his curiosity, and Captain Huddy at once explained the statements he had just made.

"The Connecticut people made a settlement in northern Pennsylvania, as perhaps you may know, at Wyoming. Last summer Colonel John Butler and Brant, an Indian chief, led a force of British and Indians from western New York against the peaceful little place.

Almost every man there was butchered by them! The place was burned to the ground and the women and children, at least those who could go, for all others were tomahawked or shot, were carried away captives. And now I have just had word that only a few days ago the same wretches went up to Cherry Valley in New York, and treated the settlers there as they had done a little while before those at Wyoming. Hard as it is, it is still only what we must expect. And we must brace ourselves for the final struggle. I pray God it may soon come, but whether it comes soon or no, you and I must stand ready to do our part, my lad!"

Captain Huddy's glowing face and solemn manner had become more and more impressive, and Tom Coward looked at him as if he were not of the same class of men he had known in all of his young life before. And perhaps he was not mistaken. Certain it is that among the so-called humble leaders of the terrible days of the Revolution, few men were as intense in their devotion, as regardless of consequences to themselves, as was this leader in the militia of Old Monmouth.

"There's another subject I must speak of," said Captain Huddy, suddenly changing his

tone and manner, "and that has slight reference to the God of battles. It has the rather to do with the things of this world. I'm afraid the militia won't be able to receive much, if any, money very soon. Our congress has put out so much money — paper money, you understand — that it has largely lost its value. It's worth now only about one eighth as much as it ought to be, and I'm afraid that soon people will be saying, 'It is n't worth a continental,' when they want to express their contempt for anything. The British have made matters worse for us, for in New York they've been counterfeiting our money and passing it off on our poor people, especially here in Monmouth, till almost every one is afraid to take any more of it, no matter who offers it. But I'm sure you'll stand true, Tom, money or no money. Some day you'll be paid; but for the present we must stand for the defense of our homes, money or not. Personally I've turned all of my possessions over to the government, except my house over here at Colt's Neck, and I'd give that too if I could make it available. I'm alone in this world, Tom, but I'd rather stand so and be right than go with the multitude if they are wrong, and that's the reason

I've been talking to you in this way, for I want you to learn the best way. I've known you and watched you, my boy, ever since I helped bring you in from that wreck, — let me see, it must be a dozen years ago, — and we laid the body of your poor drowned mother in the churchyard."

"Tell me about her," said Tom softly.

"There is n't much to tell. We found you and her on a cotton bale, floating, as you doubtless have heard, in that fearful storm. She had tied you fast to her, and even the struggle in the water had n't torn her arms away from you. She had a beautiful face, and when the women placed her on the beach after we came ashore she looked like some young girl lying there asleep. She had long brown hair, and they said her eyes were brown too, but I never saw them. She was a lady, though; that could be seen by any one. Her hands had never done much work, and the rings she wore showed that probably she had belonged to some family of wealth. But you know all about that part of it."

"I never saw any rings and never knew there were any."

"What! You don't mean to say Benzeor Osburn never showed you the rings?"

“Never! It’s the first time I ever heard them mentioned. Captain Huddy, what do you think made Tye start so when I mentioned Colonel Coward’s name? I never thought of connecting that with him till just now when you’ve been telling me about my mother.”

“Oh, I don’t know. There’s no accounting for a slave’s doings.”

The spell was broken and Tom rose to go.

“There’s one thing more I want to say to you before you leave,” said the captain, advancing toward the door as Tom withdrew. “As I said, I have no family to mourn for me if I — if anything happens to me, and you have no one to sorrow if you should fall. I do not mean that no one would grieve,” he hastily added, “for many would do that; but no kindred.”

“I may have some to gain.”

“That’s only a dream, I fear. Now, Tom, I am thinking of sending you on a dangerous errand. You are young, you know every foot of the country in Old Monmouth, and no one is dependent upon you. Such men as you and I must take greater risks than those who are fathers or husbands or sons. What do you say, my lad?”

"I don't know what you want me to do," said Tom, in a low voice.

"I may not want you to do anything," said the captain, suddenly changing his tone. "I only fear I may have to call upon you, and I wanted to warn you. I know you will be ready if the call must be made. It may be weeks before I shall want you, and it may not be at all. Only if you get word from me, or I myself see you, you will know then and not before. Good-by, my boy," and the captain shook Tom's hand and turned back into the house.

Tom remained in the camp until the following morning, and then on foot started once more for the company to which he belonged. In the air of the early morning the solemn words which Captain Huddy had spoken at the parting the night before lost a part of their seriousness. Still the effect was not entirely gone, and the lad found himself conjecturing what the dangerous work, which he might be called to do, was. But even the problem could not long trouble a hearty young soldier in the Monmouth militia on such a morning as that. The bracing air, the rest and refreshment of the night, the prospect of soon rejoining Little Peter and his compan-

ions, were too strong for gloomy fears to prevail.

Even Giberson's escape appeared in a different light now, and Tom was almost ready to laugh at the shrewd trick Debby had played upon the keeper of the county jail. That story about her having jumped from one hogshead to another without touching her hands to the sides, was almost beyond his power to believe; but it was worth telling anyhow, and he would relate it as soon as he had returned to camp. Little Peter would enjoy it, and Michael, doubtless, would be ready with a tale to match it.

In good spirits the lad kept on his way, and by the middle of the afternoon he was once more with his friends, and the story he had to tell was one which certainly interested his hearers:

"I don't believe Debby ever made that jump," said Little Peter solemnly, when Tom stopped.

"Faith and Oi do," said Michael. "I could do it mesilf."

"You, Mike? You might fall into a tub, but you could n't even climb out alone," said Little Peter.

"Come now," said Michael, eager for a

test. "Come now, and I'll show you what Mike Conners can do."

"You know there is n't a hogshhead within a mile of the camp, Mike. That 's the reason you 're so bold. Mike 's been off on an expedition too, Tom, since you 've been away. Tell him about it, Mike."

"Oi will that," replied the Irishman, mollified at once. "Is it about thim fats yez be after speakin' of, Pater?"

"You know very well it is, Mike. You see," he explained to Tom, "they 've been burning the salt works again, and a detail was sent over to stop them, and Mike here was one to go. He played a clever trick on the rascals, too."

"Yis, Oi fixed 'em," said Michael. "If Oi had only been there on toime, Oi 'd saved ivery one o' them salt tubs. Bedad, come on now, will yez? Oi 'll go up there and jump out o' one o' thim fer yez. That 's as good as a hogshhead, ivery day of the wake."

"Hold on, Mike, I want to hear about your trick, the one you played on the Tories," said Tom.

"Thrick, is it? Will, thin, it was n't very much of a thrick at all, at all. Ivery thing Oi did was to take a little stick — no, that 's

not what Oi mane. It was n't a bit of a stick, but jist one o' thim little paces o' red dirt. All Oi did was to take the little stick — no, the dirt Oi mane — and make a little crooked mark wid it. Sure, any one could do that same."

Michael's pride was so evident, and Tom's confusion was so plainly marked, that Peter hastened to explain. "They've been burning the salt works again, Tom, while you've been away. A schooner anchored off here and a boatload of men came ashore, and before any one knew it they'd set fire to Main's salt works; you know where they are. Our men got down there in the morning, but it was too late to do anything. They were surprised that only a part of the works were burned, for you see some were left standing and as good as ever. Mike here had seen something the others had n't, though, for it seems that on the buildings they left standing the letter R was written with red chalk. No one thought anything about it, but Mike took some chalk and went around and marked some of the other buildings farther up the shore. Well, the next night another raid was made, and would you believe it every one of the places Mike had marked was left standing?"

“Good for you, Mike!” said Tom enthusiastically, “you ’re a jewel.”

“That ’s what me mither was after tellin’ me afore yez were born,” replied Michael, greatly elated by the praise. “This is the picture Oi was makin’,” and he rose, and, taking a piece of red chalk from his pocket, scrawled a huge R upon the wall of the room in which they were seated. “It is n’t ivery one wid all his larnin’ could be after doin’ that,” he said, as he stood back and proudly regarded his labors.

“We ’re likely to learn some more letters, too, before long,” said Little Peter. “Come on and we ’ll go and get our supper.”

The trio all rose at his suggestion and at once departed from the house to prepare their supper, to which Tom at least was ready to do ample justice.

CHAPTER XV

AT THE MOUTH OF THE INLET

THE little garrison at Toms River had erected a rude fort, or blockhouse, not far from the bridge. This was built of heavy logs with loopholes between them, and had a number of brass swivels on the top, which was left entirely open. There was no way of entering but by climbing, and when the ladders were removed the militia, in their false sense of security, thought the place to be well-nigh impregnable. In addition to the small brass cannon, the men were supplied with rifles and muskets, some of which were equipped with bayonets, and also had long pikes or spears, which, in a hand-to-hand contest, were expected to afford efficient aid in the defense of the place.

The men themselves were quartered in the few houses which the little settlement then boasted, or in the tents which were scattered in an irregular line around the blockhouse. The rules by which they were governed were few, and to a certain extent each man was

compelled to look after his own wants. Forage was scanty, and, as the winter days drew on, it happened more than once that the problem of food became a pressing one.

As a natural consequence, many of the militia were detailed to search the surrounding region for provisions, while their comrades in arms gave themselves to the protection of the salt works, one of the few remaining sources to which the government might look for a small income, and to the defense of the scattered homes of the patriots from the attacks of marauding bands which sometimes approached from the ocean and sometimes advanced from the adjacent forests, where they had assembled, secure from discovery, as they fancied, within the shadows of the tall trees.

In these various duties six weeks passed. For the most part Tom and his immediate friends were among the foraging parties, but eager as they were, and loyal as were the patriots of the region, the supply of food was oftentimes found to be inadequate, and the brave little band of soldiers were compelled to endure hunger, in addition to their other hardships; still no one thought of complaining, and such aid as could be given the suffering patriots was readily bestowed.

The winter was well-nigh gone now, and the men were looking forward to the coming of the warmer days with a pleasure that was expressed on the faces of all. Once Tom had gone back home, for so he called Benzeor Osburn's house, and once Little Peter had returned; but as they found all were well there, and as the intrepid Sarah had sturdily declared the presence of the boys was not needed, they had both felt somewhat relieved when they resumed their duties in the camp.

It was at this time that Captain Huddy returned for a brief visit to the garrison, and as soon as he beheld him, Tom somehow had the feeling that now the task the stern old warrior had hinted at weeks before might be given him to do. Nor was he mistaken; for the very evening after his arrival the lad was summoned to the captain's quarters, and as soon as he entered he knew from the manner in which he was greeted that something unusual was in the leader's thoughts.

"You recollect the suggestion I made the last time I saw you?" said Captain Huddy, after he had greeted the young soldier.

"Yes," replied Tom, his heart sinking as he spoke.

“ Well, the time has come, and you will have to respond, my boy.”

“ What can I do ? What is it you want of me ? ”

“ I’ll come to the point at once. You know where Refugee Town is ? ”

“ Yes.”

Tom well knew the place and knew but little good of it.

It was a settlement or hamlet on the shore near the Hook to which many of the most desperate refugees and Tories of Old Monmouth had resorted, and had become a leading centre from which some of the worst of the bands had started on their marauding expeditions. Negroes, many of whom were escaped slaves, lawless men of all classes and conditions, refugees, Tories, pine-robbers, and outlaws, were there, and by their combined efforts had been too strong to be driven out or to be compelled to disperse. Yes, Tom knew where Refugee Town was and the character of the men there, and the knowledge only served to increase his uneasiness when Captain Huddy referred to the place.

“ You must go there, Tom. I don’t mind telling you that we have heard rumors of another expedition from New York not unlike

that of the 'Greens' a few months ago. As it has come to us, the report seems to be that the men will land at Refugee Town, and if they start into the country and are joined by the rascals there, you can readily see what is likely to befall the good people of Old Monmouth."

"What do you want me to do?" inquired Tom in a low voice.

"You are to go there. You know the locality, and you are to go right into the place as if you were one of them yourself. You are to find out whether there is any truth in this rumor or not, and report at once to me."

"I'm to be a spy then, am I?"

"You don't need to call yourself by that name," said the captain hastily. "All I expect of you is to find out about this reported expedition."

"But I know some of the men there, and some of them know me, I'm afraid. If I'm suspected, what will happen?"

"I do not deny the danger, but you will have to go in spite of it. As I told you, no one is dependent upon you, and in case anything serious befell you, not so many would suffer as would if I sent other men. I simply cannot send a man who has children looking

to him for support. It is not that I would lightly endanger your life, my boy, you know me too well for that, nor do I think it at all certain you will be in any great peril. You are young, and I know you well enough to feel sure you will keep your wits about you."

"I suppose they'd treat me as Stephen Edwards was served if they found out what I was sent for."

The captain's face clouded as he replied, "There is danger of that, I'll not deny it. God forbid that I should send you blindly into peril of your life. But some one must go. We must find out about this report; but, my boy, if you're afraid" —

"I'm going, of course I'm going," interrupted Tom quickly. "I'm not drawing back, Captain Huddy, only I wanted to know just what I had to expect."

"That's the true spirit, my boy," said the captain solemnly. "I thought I was not mistaken in my estimate of you."

"Am I to go alone?"

"Why, yes, I had thought so. I had not thought of sending any one with you."

"Little Peter can't go, that much is sure," said Tom. "He was there only last summer, and it would n't be safe for him to go again."

He'd be known. Then too he has some others looking to him, and no one in the world would care if I was hanged as Stephen Edwards was."

"Nay, that is not so. Many would care, my boy, but the very fact that you are not much more than a boy, and yet have learned to take good care of yourself, is one of the reasons why I have selected you for this dangerous enterprise. Is there any one you would like to have go with you?"

"There's Mike Conners," suggested Tom.

Captain Huddy hesitated a moment and then said, "I'm not at all sure that he would be of any use to you; but, if you desire, he may go too. Now, Tom, I want you to think not only of the danger, but also of what it will mean for you, to say nothing of the lives and property of many of our people, if you succeed. And I believe firmly you will."

For a long time various plans of procedure were discussed, and at last, when Tom rose to depart, it had been agreed that Michael should go with him and that they should start on the following morning.

That evening we may be sure was a serious one for Tom Coward. Michael was delighted with the prospect, but Tom and Little Peter

talked long and earnestly together. It was a serious crisis in the history of the old county when boys of their age had to be selected for such dangerous tasks. Small wonder is it that they learned to bear the yoke in their youth and became old before their time.

Although Tom fully understood the nature of his errand now, he had no thought of drawing back from it, but the grip he gave Little Peter's hand early on the following morning when he and Michael were prepared to depart had a wealth of meaning all its own. And Little Peter understood, and the returning grasp he gave his long-time friend afforded a deal of comfort to the anxious lad. Once started Tom did not look back. Perhaps he did not dare trust himself to do so. Still he knew that Little Peter stood on the hill watching him as long as he remained within sight.

Tom and Michael soon made their way to the shore, for it had been arranged that they should make the long journey along the beach; and with their guns over their shoulders they walked briskly forward. All day they marched on, and at night halted at one of the little huts the fishermen had used before the outbreak of the war.

The sun had not appeared when they resumed their journey on the following morning, but thus far they had not been molested. The greater danger was before them, however, and as they drew near the region in which many of the dastardly deeds had recently been committed, their watchfulness increased. Even Michael apparently had lost much of his eagerness, and in silence trudged on by Tom's side. The occasional inlets they came to compelled them to make some slight deviation in their direction, but they had already covered about two thirds of their journey and soon would be near the end.

It was now about eleven o'clock in the morning. They had approached one of the numerous inlets, but had been fortunate enough to find a rude raft on the shore which they had unhesitatingly appropriated to their own uses. They had just landed and were approaching the dune which hid from their sight a part of the view of the ocean, when Michael suddenly stopped and exclaimed, —

“Faith! Look at that, will yez?”

Tom glanced quickly in the direction indicated by his companion, and to his consternation beheld a vessel riding at anchor and close to the shore. While he was watching

the men on deck, and the sound of their voices came to them, Michael suddenly added, —

“They’re behind us too, bedad! The woods is full of ’em.”

Tom turned and looked up the inlet. There, not more than six rods distant and just turning the point, was a yawl. Five men were on board, and the sight of the bodies of recently slaughtered cattle which constituted their cargo at once disclosed who the men were and what their errand had been. If any doubt had remained, it would have been quickly dispelled by the sight of a half dozen or more men, who, on the shore of the inlet no farther away than the yawl itself, were driving before them two or three sheep and as many cows.

Tom instantly perceived that they had met one of the numerous bands sent out from New York in search of fresh beef and mutton.

“Come, Mike!” he called. “Come on! We haven’t a minute to lose!” and without waiting for his companion, he started swiftly toward the pine-trees, which grew close to the shore of the ocean and were only a few yards away.

As he gained the shelter, an exclamation

from Michael caused him to glance behind him, and to his consternation he saw that his companion had stumbled and fallen. Before he could rise three of the men had run swiftly forward, and as they were now between the woods and the unfortunate Irishman, the latter abandoned all efforts to escape and quietly waited for the soldiers to approach.

Tom was almost desperate. He was tempted to return to the aid of his friend, but he instantly perceived that such an attempt would be worse than useless. And yet he was so near that he could hear the sound of their voices. The lad crouched behind the thick bushes and trees and waited. Every moment he expected the men would turn and follow him, but for some strange reason which he could not understand, he was not pursued. He could see the men and Michael, and breathlessly watched them.

Michael had stopped, and apparently unconscious of danger was awaiting the approach of the strangers.

"Who are you?" called one of them as he drew near. Michael smiled blandly but made no reply.

"Who are you?" again demanded the man.

Michael's smile was still more bland as he placed one hand on his ear and turned his face away from the speaker as if he were striving to hear what he was saying.

"Who are you? Where'd you come from?"

"Yis," said Michael, in a shrill, unnatural voice. "Yis, there's a big lot o' thim," pointing as he spoke to the woods on the farther side of the inlet.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the man in a louder tone.

"What? What's that yez say?" replied the Irishman still more shrilly than before.

"What are you doing here?" The man placed his hand roughly on Michael's shoulder and shouted the words in his ear.

"Oi understand yez. Oi understand ivery word yez say," said Michael, smiling blandly upon all of the men about him.

"Well, speak up then and give an account of yourself."

"It's Captain Huddy in command o' thim. They've brass cannon and guns."

The men stopped and looked uneasily at one another. "The fellow's either a fool or deaf as a stone post," said one of them.

"What's that yez was after sayin'?" said

Mike, turning to the man who had just spoken. "Yez would n't suspect it at all, at all, but Oi'm a bit hard o' hearing. If yez would just spake up Oi'd be that glad."

"What are you doing here?" shouted the one who had first spoken.

"Oh, now Oi hear yez," replied Michael, his expression betraying evident pleasure, "Oi hear ivery word yez say. Oi'm not that deaf that some thinks, bedad! Now Oi'll tell yez. It's that same Cap'n Huddy Oi was tellin' yez about. He's got a big army and he's started, bedad. Oi got away, but the likes o' yez will have to be after startin' to wanst, Oi'm thinking."

"The man's either a fool, or the rebels are coming," said one.

"That's true for yez," said Michael quickly. "Oi can till what yer lips mane, whin Oi can't catch the sound of yer voice at all. Yez be corriet about Cap'n Huddy. He'll be here to wanst."

"Don't stop any longer to bother with him," said one of the men to the leader. "Let's take him aboard. Perhaps we can make him understand better there."

It may have been that Michael's face blanched at the words, but his beaming smile

was not diminished. He prepared to speak again, when he was suddenly interrupted by a shout from the boat off the shore.

All the men looked up and there, not more than two hundred yards away, two whale-boats could be seen coming swiftly towards the sloop. Already they were between it and the shore, and in the presence of the new danger the obtuse prisoner was instantly forgotten ; and with a responsive shout, unmindful even of the sheep and cattle, the men started toward the mouth of the inlet.

CHAPTER XVI

A CAPTURED SLOOP

As soon as Michael perceived that his own presence was for the moment ignored, he lost no time in following the direction in which his companion had disappeared, and soon came upon Tom, who was crouching behind the bushes in the borders of the woods, and gazing eagerly at the movements of the men in the whale-boats and on the shore.

“It’s fooled ’em, Oi did, bedad!” exclaimed the almost breathless Irishman. “Oi was that deaf that Oi could n’t be after hearin’ me own name. Come on, me lad, come on! We’ll lave the beggars to fight it out by thimselves.”

“Keep still, Mike,” replied Tom quickly.

He was well aware of the peril of remaining longer in their present position; but he was almost fascinated by the sight before him. The two whale-boats had now separated, and one was approaching the little sloop from the ocean side, while the other remained between the vessel and the shore.

Never before had he seen boats handled as were these. With long oars and powerful strokes the men sent the swift crafts forward, and every oarsman seemed to understand just the part which devolved upon himself.

On board the sloop only three men could be seen, and they were huddled together near the rail, evidently as deeply interested in the approach of the whale-boats as was the excited lad in the bushes, who was watching their every movement. Nearer and nearer came the approaching parties, and soon were within hailing distance of the little crew. Up to this time not a word had been spoken nor a gun fired; but just then the men on shore, with a shout, fired at the whale-boat nearest them.

What the effect of the shot was Tom could not perceive, but it plainly had not checked the efforts of the men at the oars. In the bow was a small brass cannon, which glittered in the sunlight, and when the boat had approached within fifty yards of the sloop, the man at the helm rose from his seat for a moment and peered carefully ahead. He raised his hand, and instantly the men backed water and the progress was stayed. The man was endeavoring to discern whether the sloop had

any cannon on board, Tom thought, and his conjecture proved to be correct, for apparently satisfied with his observation, the leader called to the men on the deck of the sloop.

Tom could easily see them, and also as easily see the guns in their hands, which it was evident they were ready to use if the attacking party came nearer.

A brief conversation between the man at the helm of the whale-boat and those on board the sloop followed, and some of the words Tom could hear distinctly from his place of concealment. It was plain that the man was calling upon the little crew to surrender, and equally plain that they had refused the demand. The conversation was continued for a brief time, and then Michael suddenly exclaimed, —

“Bedad! And did yez iver hear the loikes o’ that?”

A swift approach of the whale-boat which was on the farther side of the sloop had caused Michael to utter his exclamation of astonishment. With a shout, the men had given way together, and with incredible swiftness were now approaching the sloop. The shout and the danger threatening from the other side caused the excited crew to rush to

the opposite side of the deck, and raising their guns they discharged them together at their enemies.

The shot was the signal which the man who had been speaking was evidently waiting for, and at a word from him his companions bent to their oars, and swift as the wind bore down upon the sloop. The speed of the other whale-boat, meanwhile, had not slackened in the least, although Tom could not discover whether any of the men had been shot or not. Almost together the two whale-boats were alongside the helpless sloop, and the men were clambering on board. Not a shot was fired then, but it was evident in a moment that the little vessel had fallen into the hands of the sturdy captors.

But a new peril now threatened the brave men. Those who were on the shore had not been idle; but as soon as they had discharged their guns they turned to the two yawls which now were near the mouth of the inlet. Rapidly they cast the cargo overboard. Fresh meat, although desirable, was not to be permitted to interfere with the retention of the sloop. With desperate haste the men labored, and in a brief time the yawls were free; the men had hastily reloaded their guns and,

placing them within easy reach, quickly took their seats and began to row toward the sloop and their unfortunate companions.

By the time the captors had secured possession of the sloop, the boats had covered half the intervening distance between the vessel and the shore, and the men were pulling with such desperate zeal that in a few minutes they would be close to its side, and another desperate hand-to-hand conflict would doubtless occur.

Tom was breathing hard in his excitement, and even Michael had not uttered a word. The attack and capture had occupied such a brief time that the attention of both the watchers had been completely occupied with the rapidly moving events. And now the climax was at hand.

As the yawls swept swiftly over the water, Tom began to fear that their approach had not been discovered by the men on board the sloop, whose attention doubtless had been entirely taken up with their own struggle.

In his eagerness the lad was about to rush forth from the woods and shout a warning to his friends, for so he somehow considered the attacking party, when he perceived that his efforts were not needed. There was a quick

movement on board, two men leaped into the whale-boat which he could see, and a half dozen or more clambered over the rail into the other one which was concealed from his sight. In a moment, however, it came around the stern of the sloop and joined its companion, the men resting upon their oars, and all intently watching the approach of the yawls which were not many yards distant.

A man whose huge size Tom marked even in his excitement now stood by the rail of the sloop and shouted to the approaching boats. His words were not heeded, and on and on swept the yawls, driven by the powerful strokes of the desperate and determined men.

Tom saw the leader turn to the men in the whale-boats, and it was evident that he had given some command, although it was impossible to hear the words from the shore. The effect, however, was at once apparent. A man quickly took his place by the little brass cannon in the bow of each whale-boat. A moment later there was a flash, a report, and a cloud of smoke shut out the view of all, and then a brief moment of intense silence followed.

As the smoke slowly rose, Michael leaped to his feet, and rushed forth from the bushes.

“Bedad! bedad! bedad!” shouted the excited Irishman, swinging his hat in his hand and dancing about on the sand.

Tom, no less excited, also ran forth and looked about at the effects of the cannon shots, effects which were at once to be seen. A ball had crashed through the side of one of the yawls, and the progress of the boat was instantly stayed. Quickly it filled with water, and the excited boy could soon see the men struggling in the sea. Whether any of them had been hit or not he could not determine, but his attention was instantly drawn to the other boat. That evidently had not been struck, but the rowers backed water, gazed for a moment in consternation at the mishap of their fellows, and then once more grasping their oars, changed the direction of their boat, and with all the speed they could summon began to pull for the shore.

Instantly the men who had captured the sloop changed their course, one of the whale-boats going to the assistance of the men in the water and the other starting in swift pursuit of the yawl, which now was headed for the shore.

Tom's attention was withdrawn from the former to the race which then took place. It

was at once evident that the yawl was no match for its swift pursuer. With strokes that almost lifted the whale-boat from the water, the skilled and powerful men sent it forward. Steadily it gained upon the yawl, and it was soon clear that the men would not be able to gain the beach before their pursuers would be upon them.

Perceiving that all efforts to escape would now be fruitless, at the call from the helmsman in the whale-boat the efforts of those who were in the yawl ceased and the pursuit was ended. Quickly the whale-boat drew alongside, and after a delay of a moment the course was reversed and together the men started back for the sloop.

The movements of the other whale-boat were now perceived, and instantly both boats hastened to the assistance of the men struggling in the water. Soon they were among them, and Tom could see one man after another drawn into the boats. One who was unobserved by the searching parties had succeeded in making his way to the shore, and, falling and stumbling, scrambled up the sandy beach and quickly darted into the woods. Not until after he had disappeared from sight did it occur to Tom that he himself might

be of assistance ; but when the impulse came it was too late. The escaping man was gone, and all efforts to discover or overtake him would now be useless.

The three boats could now be seen returning to the sloop, and they soon regained its side. The men clambered on deck, carefully lifting two of the prisoners, by which it was evident that the cannon ball had done more than merely sink the yawl. Breathlessly Tom had watched the movements, as unmindful as Michael that he had left the woods and was standing where he could easily be seen by the men on board the sloop. That he was seen at once became apparent when he saw the men on deck stop, and then five of them quickly resumed their places in one of the whale-boats and started directly towards the shore on which Tom and his companion were standing.

“Me bye,” said Michael, “it’s toime for the both of us to be after lavin’,” and the excited Irishman turned and began to run swiftly towards the woods again.

“Hold on, Mike ! Come back here !” called Tom.

Tom was no less excited than was his companion, and perhaps as much alarmed as he ;

but although he did not know who the captors of the sloop had been, he conjectured that they must be friendly to the cause of the colonies. At all events he seemed determined to incur the risk, or it may have been that his excitement prevented him from taking careful thought.

Michael halted, then slowly returned and stood by Tom's side watching the approaching boat. "It's that deaf Oi am that Oi sha'n't be able to hear a word, me bye. Oi feel the disase comin' on me for sure this toime."

Tom made no reply, for he was watching the whale-boat now. It mounted the crest of the waves like a seagull. For a moment it would be partly concealed from sight, then would rise again, and all the time was swiftly approaching. Perhaps it would be better not to wait for its coming. He could easily discover some hiding-place in the woods, for it was not too late yet. Still the lad hesitated and lingered on the shore, never once taking his eyes from the sight of the long narrow boat before him, which now was only a few rods from the shore.

The men rested for a moment on their oars, two or three waves passed them, and then discovering the one approaching which he

desired, the leader gave the word, the men responded with a will, and the light craft was lifted on the crest, then borne swiftly forward by the combined force of the wave and the oarsmen, and a moment later was in the falling surf. Instantly four of the men leaped overboard, grasped the sides of the boat, held it a moment as the retreating wave sucked the sand from beneath their feet, and then with the next incoming sea bore the boat far up the shore beyond the reach of the crawling waves.

Without waiting for them to approach, Tom ran quickly toward them, followed by the reluctant Michael. As he drew near, his heart sank, for not one of the men did he recognize, and it was impossible to determine to which side they belonged. His voice failed him for the moment, and even then he was almost tempted to turn and seek safety in flight.

Before he could do that, one of the strangers advanced and spoke. "I don't know who you are, my lad, but if you belong to the sloop you had better come back to your place."

"I don't belong there," stammered Tom.

"Come on, then, just the same. We've

no time to waste here, and you can tell Adam your story. He'll know whether to set you ashore again or ship you along with his new crew."

"Adam? Adam who?"

"Adam Hyler, at your service. Mayhap you've heard the name before?"

Tom's heart gave a great throb of relief. Heard of Adam Hyler? Who in Old Monmouth had not heard of him? He had been in the service of the king at the breaking out of the war, but had soon withdrawn and given his strength and time to the cause for which his own countrymen were fighting. He had made his headquarters at Brunswick, and with his band of picked men had been active along the banks of the Raritan and in Raritan bay. The number of his followers had gradually increased until they formed no inconsiderable number, and they were all men who shared in the qualities of their leader, for Adam Hyler was said never to have permitted a man who knew fear to engage with him in his perilous enterprises. Whale-boats and swift-sailing sloops were concealed by him along the shores of the river and bay; and at the times when marauding parties entered the region, then Adam's men started forth on their labors.

Boats had been taken by them, and men captured, until even the desperadoes at Refugee Town were more afraid of him than they were of the great Washington himself.

And of late it was reported that Adam Hyler had enlarged the field of his activities until along the Jersey shore from Sandy Hook to Egg Harbor there was scarcely a place on which his heavy hand had not been laid. Not that he could prevent the enemy from coming, but ofttimes he had been successful in preventing them from returning; and the British were eager to capture him. Perhaps Adam's deeds were not less bold and valiant because he knew what his fate would be if once he fell into their hands. It would be the same as that which had befallen Stephen Edwards, only the yard-arm would take the place of the elm-tree.

Yes, Tom Coward knew all about the brave Captain Adam Hyler; and although he had never seen him, it was with eagerness and hope that had quickly sprung up in his heart that he, along with Michael, took his seat in the whale-boat, and was ready to start with the men for the captured sloop.

CHAPTER XVII

CAPTAIN ADAM HYLER

THE men quickly pushed the whale-boat out into the surf, wading in the water until it came to their waists, and leaping on board, apparently minding their wetting no more than if the day had been in midsummer; and then with strong strokes began to row back to their companions. Tom marked the skill and strength of each oarsman, and could easily believe the stories he had heard concerning the picked men who were said to make up the bands of Captain Hyler, for no one was permitted to join his forces who was not known to be a strong man and thoroughly familiar with the handling of boats.

Michael, who did not as yet understand the meaning of their apparent capture, watched the men, and glancing occasionally at the sloop toward which they were rapidly making their way, betrayed his alarm, which doubtless was but natural. His companion, however, had not spoken since they had left the shore

behind them, and to the troubled Irishman his silence only seemed to increase his uneasiness.

“Whist!” said Michael in a loud whisper to Tom. “It’s a warm reception they’re after givin’ us, Oi’m thinkin’.”

Tom could see that the men on the sloop had assembled by the rail and were watching the returning boat, and as it came nearer, perhaps under other circumstances the lad’s heart might have been as uneasy as that of the troubled Michael by his side, but as it was he was strangely unmindful of the peril.

In a few minutes the whale-boat drew alongside the sloop, and Tom and Michael were received on board. The men were all unknown to Tom, but the curious glances they gave him made him feel that he was glad that he was not to meet them in any other than a friendly way, for so he was confident the meeting would prove to be.

“What have you here, Jack? More of the rascals who want to come with us?”

The speaker was a powerful man, whose deep voice and confident manner betrayed alike his strength and the position he held among his fellows. In spite of the fact that the day was cold, his shirt was open in the

front, and the great muscles of his chest and arms could be plainly seen. Tom at once concluded that this must be Captain Adam Hyler himself.

"I don't know, cap'n," replied the man, who had been addressed as Jack. "We brought 'em aboard, and they can tell their story themselves."

"Is this Captain Adam Hyler?" inquired Tom of the man who had first spoken.

"That's my name. And who may you be?"

"I'll tell you all I know if you'll let me speak to you by yourself."

Captain Hyler looked keenly at Tom a minute and then said, "I don't know that that's necessary. Speak up right here where you are if you've got anything to say. If you have n't, the sooner you're in the hold with the rest o' your gang the better."

Tom hesitated a moment and then said, "I've come from Captain Huddy."

"Josh Huddy? Did he send ye here?"

"Yes."

"Come over this way and I'll hear your story," said the captain, withdrawing to another part of the deck. "Now be quick," he added, when Tom and he were by them-

selves, "we've no time to waste here. This sloop is the Success, but it won't be if we stay here long."

"Captain Huddy sent me and Michael," began Tom quickly, "to Refugee Town. He wanted us to find out whether it was true that the Tories were planning to make another raid such as they did a few months ago. We have n't been there yet, but we were on our way when we stopped here by the inlet and watched your men take the yawls and this sloop."

"How do I know you're telling me the truth?" It was evident that Captain Hyler was interested in Tom's statement, but he was too wary to be caught off his guard.

Thus bidden, Tom briefly related his story, dwelling particularly upon the capture of Giberson and also the escape which the outlaw had made by the help of his sister. He also spoke of his meeting with Colonel Tye and the threats which the latter had boldly made against the life of Captain Huddy.

"I've no doubt it's all as you say," said Captain Hyler at last when the story was ended, "but whether it's true or not I've no time to look it up. But there's one thing I want to know. How did you expect to find

out, when you got to Refugee Town, whether the redcoats were coming or not?"

"I don't know, for Captain Huddy did n't tell me what to do. All he said was that he must know whether there was anything in the report or not. He said he'd have to leave everything else to us."

"'T was kind of him," grunted the captain, "to send a youngster like you up among those rascals. They'd have about as much mercy with a spy as Josh Huddy himself had with young Edwards."

Tom made no reply. He himself had felt that much had been expected of him, but he knew how desperate and determined the leader was, and also how lightly he regarded his own life, and perhaps Tom's life was not of much more value in his eyes. He certainly had hinted as much, or at least had implied that others would not suffer if he should fall.

"Josh Huddy ought not to have done that to Steve Edwards. He might have held the boy, but he ought not to have strung him up as he did; but he did it, and there's no more to be said; and now he's sending you on this fool errand too, is he?"

"That is n't what he calls it."

"That's what it is, whether he calls it that

or not. He has no business to send you on such a piece o' work. It's certain death. What would your pop and marm say? He ought to think o' them a bit."

"I have no father or mother. I was Benzeor Osburn's bound boy."

As the rough captain's face softened a little, Tom hastily explained to him how he happened to be in the militia.

"Ho! That's it, is it? I know all about Benzeor Osburn."

"Where is he now?" said Tom eagerly.

"He's where he'll roast no other woman's toes, as he did Peter Van Mater's wife's."

"Is he dead?"

"I hope so, though I can't say as to that. Now, my lad, you turn and go straight back to Toms River."

"I can't do that until I have learned something about this report."

"Well, you have learned something. I'll tell you that the report is true. The Tories are going to make another raid."

"How do you know?"

"You're an impudent youngster," growled the huge captain, yet Tom could see that he was not altogether displeased. "How do I know? I know because one of my men came

from Refugee Town this very morning, and he heard all about it. That's how I know. That suit ye?"

"Yes, I suppose so," replied Tom, somewhat dubiously.

"It's true," resumed the captain earnestly, "it's true's the gospel. My man Jack was there on purpose to find out, and that's what he learned. Now I'm not afraid of risks myself, and I've had a few in my life, too, but there's no use in sending such a fellow as you up there. You'd only be running your head right into a noose. A man never gets but one head, and even if that is n't a very good one he does n't feel like parting with it, especially when two or three o' those refugees are at the other end o' the rope. Now, you've found out what you came for, and you can put straight back for camp and tell Josh Huddy that it's true, the Tories are coming, and for him to get ready to meet 'em. Tell him, too, that Adam Hyler will be on the reception committee, and will help to give 'em a good warm welcome into Old Monmouth."

"When are they coming?"

"Soon, but no one knows just the day, not even the villains themselves."

"Do you know where the raid will be?"

"Not exactly, though that is n't very hard to find out. If the 'Greens' come down here, they'll land somewhere near the Hook, of course, and that means Refugee Town most likely. Well, they are n't going to scatter too much, nor get too far away from their base o' supplies, which same will be that nest up there on the Hook. So I think it's pretty safe to say they'll give a good deal of attention to Middletown and Red Bank and Shrewsbury and that part of the country."

"About the same as they did before, then?"

"Pretty much. I wonder why you went into the militia," he added abruptly.

"Captain Huddy wanted me to."

"No doubt, no doubt. That's like Josh Huddy. Can you handle an oar?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, start then for Toms River. Don't be hangin' round here takin' my time, for I've got too much to do. You've found out what ye came for, and you just tell Josh for me that Adam Hyler says the 'Greens' are comin' and to look out for 'em, too. Now I'll land you and your wild Irishman, and you can make the dust fly, that is, if you can find any dust."

They turned to join the men, and Tom perceived that Michael was the centre of a group of sailors who were evidently enjoying some story the Irishman was relating.

"Yis, sir," Michael was saying, "it's true for yez, ivery word of it is true, jist as Oi'm tellin' yez. Oi'm proud o' the bye as if he was the bone o' me own flesh. He's the fellow what took Bill Giberson widout the lave o' any one. He did, sir, that's true for yez. Oi was after hearin' the sound o' the disturbance mesilf, for Oi was n't very far away, ye may belave, and when Oi got where Oi could see the fracas, there was Bill Giberson a-jumpin' up and down and sayin', 'Come on, will yez! come on!' Bill could jump, that he could."

"Was this before or after his leg was broken?" inquired one of his hearers.

"'T was after, Oi'm thinkin'," said Michael quickly, "for if it had been afore, he'd have jumped straight over the very trees themselves to get away from that lad. As Oi was sayin', Bill was jumpin' and ravin' and shakin' his sthick and callin' out for the lad to come over and he'd have it out wid him. Well, sir, that bye walked up to him, an' as cool as if he was crackin' the bones of a mosquitty he

just fetched him a crack wid his shillalah, an' there was Bill Giberson shut up jist like as if he was a jack-knife; and clappin' his two hands to his lig, he begins to dance and yell out, 'Oh, me lig, me lig! It's that broke that Oi can't kick wid it at all, at all.' Up comes me bye an' jist picks up Bill Giberson; he did that, sor, jist as if he was a babby, an' him a-squallin' an' a-beggin' for mercy all the toime" —

Suddenly Michael looked up and beheld Tom before him. Unmindful of the laugh which greeted his words, he turned to Tom and said, "Oi was jist after tellin' these byes about the little toime yez had wid Bill Giberson. Perhaps yez would n't be after mindin' to add a bit of a spache to me own."

"We've got to start now, Mike," said Tom, his cheeks flushing as he perceived that the men were laughing at the story, whatever it was, that Michael had been telling and that somehow he himself was connected with it.

Captain Adam Hyler had heard the last words the Irishman had spoken, but Tom's heart was relieved when he perceived that he apparently had not heeded them, for turning to his men he gave the order for a boat to be sent ashore with Tom and his companion.

A cheer from the crew followed them as the lad and Michael took their places in the boat, and soon they were bounding over the waves on their way to the shore. Looking back Tom could see Captain Hyler among his men on deck, and it was evident that he was giving orders for the sailing of the sloop. What a great-hearted man he was! If Captain Huddy was the bulldog of Old Monmouth, as some not inappropriately had called him, then surely Captain Hyler was the mastiff of the famous old county. Of immense size, his heavy face and deep gruff voice and, above all, his great strength proclaimed him as one deserving of that title.

As soon as Tom and Michael had been landed, the crew hastily returned to the sloop, which was almost ready to depart. Without waiting to watch it, Tom in a few words explained to his companion the information he had received from Captain Huddy, and then they began their long march back to the camp at Toms River, rejoiced to have escaped the peril of an entrance into Refugee Town.

This time, however, they decided to withdraw farther into the country and follow the rough roadway rather than attempt to return by the shore, where the various inlets had

presented great difficulties in the course of their upward journey.

That night they passed in a deserted cabin in the woods, and early on the following morning resumed their journey. The day was almost gone when they found themselves near Falkinberg's tavern, and Tom resolved to enter and get some supper before they pushed forward in the darkness for the camp, which was now only a few miles distant.

They were welcomed by the landlord, and soon were seated in the little room where the meals were served. When they entered, Tom had perceived that two other men were also there, seated at a small table on the side of the room opposite the place where they themselves took their seats. At first the lad thought he did not recognize the strangers, and quietly returned the quick glance of curiosity they gave him when he entered, without a thought of fear.

As the men in low tones resumed the conversation, which had been interrupted by the entrance of the new-comers, Tom gave a startled glance at them. Surely he recognized that voice. One of the men was Ichabod Johnson, the outlaw he had heard near Giberson's nest declare that a goodly reward

had been offered by the congress for his capture. Apparently giving all attention to his supper, Tom nevertheless was listening intently. His excitement was in no wise decreased when he overheard the name of Colonel Coward spoken by Ichabod himself.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN UNPAID ACCOUNT

SATISFIED now in his own mind that one of the men seated at the other table was none other than Ichabod Johnson himself, Tom's thought had been of the reward which had first been offered for his capture. What a prize that would be if he could only secure it! Doubtless various schemes presented themselves to the mind of the young soldier, but they were speedily abandoned as he more coolly considered his own position.

While it was true that the camp of the militia was only a few miles distant, still he could hope to do little alone, for Michael's aid was not of a character which commended itself to Tom's mind, and such a man as Ichabod would not be easily taken.

Tom wondered at the boldness with which the suspected spy had ventured so near his enemies, and the only explanation he could find was in the fact that Ichabod was comparatively unknown in Old Monmouth, the

most of his deeds having been committed in the lower part of the State.

All other thoughts, however, were quickly banished when he heard the name of the man mentioned concerning whom he was so eager to learn something. There could be no doubt about the name, for Ichabod himself had spoken it. The conversation continued in low tones, only an occasional word being heard by Tom with all his efforts, and in a few minutes the men had finished their supper, and they rose to depart from the room.

"I've had all I want," said Tom to Michael. "You go on with your supper and I'll wait for you outside."

"Is it sick yez be?" inquired Michael, anxiously pausing a moment in his occupation.

"No, no, Mike. I've had all I want. I'll wait for you outside."

Hastily leaving the room, Tom went out on the low piazza of the tavern, but as soon as he stepped outside the door he perceived that the men were ready to depart. They were standing near together, each holding his horse by the bridle. Even then Ichabod's companion sprang lightly upon the back of his horse and was ready to go, waiting only to

listen to the word Ichabod was speaking in a low voice. He then touched his horse with his spurs, and in a moment was riding swiftly up the road.

Ichabod himself then prepared to mount. Still Tom hesitated, but perceiving that the man would be gone if he did not act quickly, he ran towards the horse just as his rider drew the reins and was ready to start.

"Hold on a minute," said Tom. "I want to speak to you."

Ichabod glanced quickly at the lad, whose presence he apparently had not noted, or had ignored, Tom could not determine which, and checked his horse for a moment.

"I wanted to ask you where Colonel Coward was. You are Ichabod Johnson, I know, and" —

The man gave Tom one startled look, then uttering an expression of anger struck his horse on the neck with his hand and, at the same time driving his spurs into his flanks, with a sudden burst of speed dashed away, and before the astonished boy could recover from his surprise had disappeared beyond the bend in the road.

"Bedad, and it's hungry Oi'll be this night."

It was Michael who spoke, and Tom was instantly recalled to his immediate surroundings as he beheld the Irishman standing in the doorway holding a huge piece of corn-bread in his hand and endeavoring to stay the ravages of the hunger to which he had so plaintively referred.

"Never mind, Mike, we'll make it up when we get back to camp. We'll put out right away, just as soon as I've settled my score."

Tom turned to the landlord, who was in the room behind him, and said, "How much have I to pay? We want to go at once."

"I'll write it out and see," said the landlord, seating himself at the table and beginning at once to write with a goose-quill pen.

"Oh, don't stop to write it. I'll pay it now, for we want to start."

"I always write out my accompts," said the man quietly. "'T will take but a moment."

The landlord scratched his head and bit his pen, and stopped occasionally as if he was in deep thought. Tom regarded him with impatience, and at last, unable to endure the delay, said sharply, —

"Tell me what to pay. I'll not wait longer."

"What's your name?" inquired the landlord.

"Coward. Tom Coward. Be quick."

The man wrote the name on the paper and then handed it to the impatient lad. Taking it, Tom with a wry face read the statement.

ACCOMPT OF THOM^S COWARD

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| To 1 mug of Cider | 4d |
| To Victuals | 5d |
| To 1 Dram | 4d |
| To Hot Rum | 1s 2d |
| To Liquors in Company . | 1s 7d |
| To Hay and Oats for Horse . | 1s |
| To 1-2 Bowle of Punch . . | 9d |

"What's this for?" said Tom aghast.

"That's your accompt. You will settle before you go."

"But we've had nothing but victuals. We have n't had any of these things to drink. And, besides, we're on foot, and I don't see how you could charge for hay and oats for our horse when we haven't one to our names."

"That's my accompt," said the man gruffly. "You might have had all of the

things if you'd wanted them. They're in the accompt."

"Whist!" said Michael in a loud whisper to Tom. "If it'll be any help to yez, me bye, Oi'll jist be after takin' the things mesilf. It won't be mor'n a bit of a wait, me lad."

"Keep still, Mike," said Tom quickly. He was angry as he perceived that the boniface was trying to take advantage of him. Evidently the man thought him only a boy, and was trying to frighten him into the payment of a bill, or "accompt," for things they neither of them had had. For a moment he was undecided what to do. He had no desire to make trouble for himself, but his young heart rebelled against the outrageous charge. His momentary hesitation was misinterpreted by the man, who evidently thought he would compel the lad to meet the "accompt" before he departed.

"Do you think that is a just account?" said Tom slowly.

"Of course it is. It's my regular charge, and every man settles his score before he leaves the tavern. In these times I trust no one."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Tom

quietly. "We're both of us in the militia over here at Toms River. I'll take your account back to Captain Huddy and show it to him, and if he thinks I ought to pay it, then I will. I'll tell him, too, that you had Ichabod Johnson here to supper, and I've a notion the captain will be as much interested in that as he will be in this account you've made out for me."

The startled landlord rose to his feet and gazed at Tom with an expression which clearly indicated his alarm.

"I—I—did n't understand," he stammered. "I—I did n't know you were from the camp. Was that Ichabod Johnson? Now, really, was it Ichabod himself?" he added, his voice becoming lower as he spoke.

"Yes."

"Well, now, really I'm surprised. I am indeed. I had no thought of harboring such a traitor. I had n't indeed. And as for your accompt, that is all settled. I never make any charge for our brave soldiers. I don't indeed."

"You will for us. We had the victuals and I'll pay for them." And taking the money from his pocket, Tom handed it to the trembling boniface.

"I can't take it. I really can't. I wouldn't charge the brave men who are defending us against the enemies of Old Monmouth. And you truly think that Ichabod Johnson was here? You must be mistaken, you must indeed."

As Tom made no reply and at once prepared to depart, the anxious man's protestations increased.

"Now you've had the victuals, 't is true, but there would be no more charge if you really should take the other things in the accompt. Just hand it back to me and I'll provide them all."

"Faith, an' that's the way for yez to talk," said the delighted Mike. "It's mesilf what'll attind to thim things."

"Keep still, Mike," said Tom angrily. "We're going back to camp."

The crestfallen Irishman subsided for the moment, but the landlord's fears increased. He begged for the return of the "accompt," but Tom sturdily refused to give it up, and at once departed from the house. The man followed them out into the road, mingling protestations of his innocence and pleas for the return of the offending bill, but Tom was angry, and not to be moved by threats or pleadings.

Hardly looking back at the troubled tavern-keeper, they soon passed out of his sight and rapidly made their way back to the camp, where they arrived an hour and a half later.

Tom then at once went to Captain Huddy's quarters to make his report, but to his disappointment he learned that the doughty leader was not there, though he was expected to return on the following day. He then went to seek out his friend, Little Peter, whom he found in the hut which had been assigned them as their lodging place. His story was soon told, and his friend's excitement was as keen as his own over the report that the red-coats were about to make another raid in Old Monmouth.

"I don't know what will be done," said Peter, when Tom's story was all told. "I don't see how they 'll be able to leave the camp here, if the Tories do come to plunder the upper part of the county."

"Why not? Everybody will be drawn up there, — Tories, pine-robbers, and all."

"I'm not sure about that. It strikes me that if the militia are taken away from here, that 'll be the very chance Bacon and some of the others will be waiting for. You see there 'll be no one left to defend the salt

works, and we know Bacon, at least, is not far away."

"Why? How do you know? Has anything happened while I've been gone?"

"I should say there had. We've had a fearful time of it."

As Tom made no reply, though his face expressed his eagerness to hear of the events which had occurred during his absence, Peter said, —

"You know the Wood boys up here? They live about three miles up the shore, and there are three brothers of them."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, they thought they'd try for some of the money that green stuff is said to bring in New York. They are n't exactly Tories, you see, but they are n't very strong in their feeling for the colonies, so they did n't much care if the truck they had was used in the city instead of in the camp, where it ought to be. So two or three nights ago they loaded up a whale-boat and started for town. They got there all right, and probably got a good price for their load, for this time of year such things as they had are not over plentiful. They were just ready to start for home again, but they waited till night, as you might read-

ily guess, and who should show up but Bacon himself."

"Where? In New York?"

"Yes, in New York, and he told them he was going back with them. I don't believe they fancied him very much as a passenger, but they had to make the best of it, and so took him on board and started. They had a pretty hard passage of it and did n't get down here by the inlet till it was almost dark, and then they did n't dare land for fear some of the militia would see them; so they lay off the inlet till the night came on, thinking that then they'd slide in before any one was stirring around the bay. But some of the watchers along the shore had spied them, and brought word down here to the camp; so Joshua Studson took a few men and crossed over to the inlet, and they hid themselves behind the point. They had n't been there but a little while before the whale-boat started in; but it had n't fairly rounded the point before the crew found themselves face to face with Lieutenant Studson's boat, and there did n't seem to be the ghost of a chance to get away.

"The lieutenant stood up in his boat and called to the fellows to surrender, and it

seems they wanted to do it; but Bacon was on board, you see, and he knew what would happen to him if the militia once got their hands on him, so he would n't do it, though he was the only one that had a gun on the whale-boat.

"His musket was loaded, of course, so he up with it and fired before any of our men knew what he was up to. If it was dark, his aim was n't bad."

"Why, what did he do?" inquired Tom.

"He shot the lieutenant."

"Killed him?"

"Yes, killed him the first shot. When he fell back in the boat, of course it drew the attention of his men to himself, and the whale-boat got away, and Bacon with it."

"How did you find out?"

"Why, one of the Wood boys jumped overboard and swam ashore, and came over here and gave himself up, and he told all about it. He thinks the others will all go into the army, with the redcoats I mean, for they won't dare come back here."

"The lieutenant lived right near here, did n't he?" inquired Tom soberly.

"Yes, and we had a terrible time when we carried the body up to his house, for I went

along to help, too. Poor Mistress Studson! When we came up there, carrying her poor dead husband in a blanket, she could n't believe it was true. You see he'd only left the house a few hours before as well and strong as any man in the army. And then to be brought back in that way! It was one of the most pitiful sights I ever saw. And I think I know something about that part of it myself."

Tom made no reply. For a time the boys sat together in silence, Peter busied with the sad memories of the losses in his own home, and Tom sympathizing with him in his boyish manner. His own thoughts, however, were also drawn to the action which Captain Huddy and the other leader would be likely to take. With the redcoats threatening the upper part of the county, and no cessation in the evil deeds about Toms River, there seemed to be two horns to the dilemma, each worse than the other, if such a thing could be. The problem was still unsolved, when at last the weary boys sought their beds for the night.

CHAPTER XIX

THE COMING OF THE REDCOATS

CAPTAIN HUDDY did not return on the following day, and indeed many days passed before our boys saw him again. Where he was or what he was doing could only be conjectured, for the old warrior did not return to Toms River, and only vague rumors were heard of what was occurring in the upper part of the county.

Meanwhile the uneasiness among the militia steadily increased. After the death of Lieutenant Studson there seemed to be a cessation of hostilities in the immediate vicinity of the camp, but the anxiety of the men stationed there in no way decreased. Perhaps the unusual quiet was only the lull before the storm ; and as the reports that the Tories were planning a raid in the old county increased, the restlessness of the militiamen became more and more marked as the days passed.

To Tom Coward the uncertainty was

especially hard, and there were times when his heart was somewhat bitter against the captain himself. To have been sent on such a perilous errand was bad enough of itself, but to learn that the very man who had sent him had not waited to hear his report was still harder. But day followed day and still Captain Huddy was absent and no word came from him.

It was April now, and the sun was climbing higher in the heavens. The trees had taken on their garments of green and the grass had clothed the meadows with its verdure. The very air had become soft and balmy, and tintured as it was with the breath of the sea, under different circumstances would have made the stay in camp a delight to our boys. As it was, however, the returning springtime brought thoughts of the neglected work on the farms, and many a man besides Tom and Little Peter began to chafe over the enforced idleness and the neglect of necessary duties at home.

This spirit was becoming marked now, for the reports of the coming of the Tories, though by no means ended, had ceased to stir the souls of the soldiers, and many were beginning to express doubts of their truthfulness

and openly declare that they would leave the camp and return to the pressing duties of their homes if their services in the militia were not required for greater things than the mere guarding of the little port at Toms River and the defense of the near-by salt works, which no one now seemed inclined to molest.

A sudden change came over the temper of the men in the latter part of the month, when early one morning a man came riding into the camp, his horse covered with mud and foam and the rider's face betraying the excitement under which he was laboring.

Before he had ridden in among them, the startled men seemed to be aware of what was coming, and when the breathless rider checked the speed of his horse he at once found himself surrounded by a group of the soldiers eagerly regarding him and evidently prepared for some startling message. Nor were they disappointed.

The man leaped from his saddle and shouted, "Turn out! Turn out! The Tories and refugees are coming! They're probably here already, and Captain Jonathan Forman has ordered all the militia to go to Middletown at once. Turn out! Turn out!"

In a moment a scene of intense excitement followed. All thoughts of returning to the farms were instantly forgotten, and the men, not even delaying to ask many questions of the courier, collected their few belongings, looked well to their weapons, and in a half hour all were ready to depart. The block-house was abandoned to its fate, and then three abreast the lines were formed, the word to advance was given, and the militia marched to the aid of the people about Middletown and Red Bank.

All through the hours of the day the sturdy band of forty men kept on their way, halting only for an occasional rest and to eat their dinner. The few houses they passed were for the most part abandoned, the people evidently having received word of the coming of the redcoats and having fled for safety to the shelter of the forests. The very absence of information as to what was before them seemed to increase the excitement of the men, and when the shadows of evening began to fall about them few of the soldiers were ready to stop, in spite of the fact that they had marched almost thirty miles since morning.

The region they were seeking was not far

away, and with the prospect of soon knowing more of the truthfulness of the report the men increased their speed at the call of the leader and pressed forward with renewed vigor.

The stars had by this time begun to appear in the sky. The frogs were croaking in the swamps, and the cool night air was most welcome to the marching band. Not a sign of the presence of the enemy had as yet been discovered, and the leader was considering the advisability of halting for a longer rest, when Michael, who was marching between Tom and Little Peter, startled his companions by exclaiming, —

“Bedad! And what’s the maning o’ that?”

The men all looked up at the woods, and in the distance before them could see a dull red glow, and above it a thick darkness which shut out the light of the stars.

The little settlement of Shrewsbury was only about two miles distant, and the fire seemed to be somewhere near that place. The men halted, and for a moment no one spoke, while they all intently watched the sight to which Michael had called their attention.

"The report's true, men," said the leader at last. "That fire's over by Shrewsbury, and probably the Tories know how it started."

A low murmur from the men indicated that they all agreed in the opinion which had been expressed.

"Now, men," said the leader again, "that means business for us. Is there any one of you who is not ready to go to meet it?"

"Faith, and if Oi had a good shillalah in me hands Oi'd feel a dale better," replied Michael.

"Silence there in the ranks!" called the leader sharply; "I want no nonsense. What I want to know is whether you are ready to follow me into no man knows what. Now I don't want any one to go ahead who feels like turning back. All of you who favor an advance say 'ay.'"

An intense but low reply arose apparently from every man in the ranks.

"Now if any one wants to fall out he can do it. I think you all voted to go ahead; but if any one did n't, he can drop out now. Better now than later, and I'll wait a minute."

The leader paused, but not a man stirred from his place.

"It's only a bit of a shindy," murmured Michael. "Me blood is up, and it's ready for the fracas Oi am. Ah, if Oi only had a good shillalah in me hands!"

"What's that?" said the leader sharply. "Does some one want to drop out?"

"Niver a bit, me darlint," replied the irrepressible Irishman.

"Then if all are ready, we'll start. Look well to your priming, men. All ready? Then, forward march!"

The band moved forward at the command and no one spoke. Indeed, the silence was as oppressive as the threatening danger. As they advanced, the dull red glow became more distinct, but there were no darting flames to be seen, and the heavy cloud of black smoke soon became more visible.

In a half hour they had arrived on the borders of the little settlement, but not a red-coat had thus far been seen, nor could the sound of voices be heard. The condition of the fire seemed to indicate that it had been burning a long time, and the absence of men seemed ominous and strange.

The soldiers increased their speed, and soon were near enough to discover that the flames had come from houses and barns which had

been set on fire. As they halted near the remains of a house, they discovered the body of a man lying on the ground, and quickly stooping, two of them lifted him from his place.

The man was alive and still able to speak to them. From him they learned that a large body of Tories, refugees, outlaws, and others had come up the Navesink in the afternoon, had driven the people from their homes, carried away the cattle, and then set fire to the buildings.

"Then there's nothing left for me to do," said the leader. "The fires are too far gone for us to fight them, and the rascals are back at the Hook by this time."

"No, they are n't," said the wounded man. "They've gone on to Tinton Falls."

"To Tinton Falls? Then we've plenty of time left. How many of them were there?"

"Seven or eight hundred, I should think," groaned the man. "I don't just know, for I was knocked on the head when they first came. Don't wait for me. Go after them! Go after them!"

They did what they could for his comfort, and then the little band at once departed for



THE MAN WAS STILL ABLE TO SPEAK

Tinton Falls. The prospect was far graver now, for if the man's statement was correct they would meet a body which outnumbered them twenty to one. Ignoring the danger, however, the sturdy men pushed rapidly forward.

Along the road they came upon other smouldering fires, by which the advance of their enemies could be plainly marked. As they proceeded the fires became fresher, and when at last they drew near the settlement at Tinton Falls they could discern men running about the place and even see their faces in the light of the flames; for Tinton Falls had met the same fate as that which had befallen Shrewsbury, and every house and barn was burning.

Here the leader halted his men and, after consulting with two or three of them, changed the direction of the approach, and led the way across the meadows into some woods on the farther side of the hamlet.

Then, carefully and from tree to tree the band advanced, each holding his gun in readiness and watching the men before them. Tom had not spoken since the last advance had been begun; his hands were trembling and his heart was thumping against his side.

Nearer and nearer they crept, all the time keeping their eyes upon the men who were running about the little street. Surely the report of their numbers had not been exaggerated. To Tom it seemed as if there were thousands instead of hundreds of the marauders. Cattle and sheep could be seen, which had been hastily collected and driven together and were guarded by a detachment of the Tories. Out from the houses, which were already in flames, men could be seen rushing, bearing in their arms such valuables as they could find. Here and there were weeping women and children, and in one spot a number of men had been driven together whom Tom hastily concluded to be prisoners.

Not one among the militia, save the leader, had yet spoken. The flames, the sight of the frightened children, the shouts of the red-coats, the great clouds of smoke which rolled up from the burning buildings, the light and the roar of the fires combined to present a spectacle as sad as it was awful.

Tom Coward hardly knew where he was or what he was doing. He was watching the scene before him as if he were fascinated. He almost forgot the presence of his companions. He felt as if he must rush in and

strive to put out those fires, leaping and crackling and ever pouring forth their dense clouds of smoke.

He was recalled by the leader, who was now passing from man to man and in a low voice giving his directions.

“Kneel, every man of you,” he said, “and be careful of your aim. Pick out some one man and shoot low. When you hear the word let them have it and then load again instantly. Be sure and ram the bullets home.”

So he moved from man to man, and one after another took his stand obediently and waited for the signal. The very waiting soon became oppressive. Would the word never be given? Tom could see that Little Peter and Michael were still near him, each crouching behind a tree as he himself was.

“Ready, men!” called the leader in a voice they all could hear. “Take aim! Fire!”

The flash and the reports of the guns all rang out together. Tom instantly leaped to his feet and peered eagerly at the men before him. Every redcoat had stopped in his tracks at the sound of the guns, and here and there Tom could see that one and another had fallen.

The surprise lasted but a moment, however, for the call of the officers could be clearly heard. The men formed, and without hesitating a moment advanced toward the place where the militia were concealed in the woods.

So fascinated was he by the sight that Tom had forgotten all about the order to load again. He stood watching the approaching redcoats, whose movements could be plainly seen in the light of the flames, as if he could not move from the place in which he was standing. On and on came the soldiers, their numbers appearing almost countless to the lad, and still he stood as if he was waiting to greet them.

The scene suddenly changed when he heard the sound of snapping branches behind him and realized that his companions were fleeing.

Instantly recalled by the sound, he turned to his two friends and said quickly, "Come on! Come on! We can't stand here."

Apparently the men were running in every direction, and no semblance of order was maintained. Soon they were scattered and could no longer see one another, though Tom and his two friends contrived somehow to keep together.

They must have been running for half an hour, Tom thought, when at last they halted. The darkness was all about them, and they had fallen so frequently that their hands were scratched and bleeding and their clothing torn; still they had held to their guns, and the first thing to be done was to reload them. When this had been done, they looked about them and listened. In the distance the sky reflected the light of the flames, but the silence of the forest was unbroken.

"What's to be done now?" said Peter, who was the first to speak.

"That's what we must decide," replied Tom.

"Oi'll tell yez," said the ever ready Michael. "We'll be after stayin' here till it's loight, an' thin we'll be goin' back and give the spalpeens some more."

There was nothing to be done in the darkness, and so they decided to wait for the morning. How slowly the hours dragged on! Ever ready for flight at the first sign of danger, they waited and watched with an anxiety which could not be expressed.

At last the dawn came, and then creeping cautiously they made their way back towards the falls, eager to learn whether the enemy

were still there, and then to decide upon their own farther plans.

As they came nearer, clouds of smoke could still be seen in the sky, though the flames had disappeared. Soon they had gained a position from which they could look out upon the place where Tinton Falls had been, for the little hamlet was no longer there. The redcoats were gone, and cautiously the three members of the militia of Old Monmouth left the shelter of the forest and advanced towards the smoking ruins of the hamlet, eager to discover what had become of the redcoats, and to determine what their own next movements should be.

CHAPTER XX

ON THE TRAIL OF THE INVADERS

As Tom Coward and his companions drew near to the spot where only a few hours before the peaceful little hamlet of Tinton Falls had been, the full desolation of the scene presented itself. The curling smoke was still rising from the ruins of the houses, while the ashes and charred timbers lay in unsightly heaps. Not a building had been spared, even the mill itself having been destroyed in the general conflagration ; but it was evident that the redcoats were gone, and as far as they could see not a man was in sight.

As the boys silently entered the road, they discovered a few persons approaching from the woods on the opposite side. There were women and children to be seen, as well as a few men, and it required no second glance to convince Tom that they were the unfortunate people whose possessions had been so wantonly destroyed.

Joining the group, Tom and his companions

advanced with them, and soon were moving about among the ruins. Some of the children were sobbing, and the women were crying and wringing their hands as they beheld the devastation, and truly it was a sight to move the heart even of the hardest. All the labors of a lifetime had been destroyed in one night, and it was soon discovered also that none of the cattle or sheep had been left behind. The raid had been a cruel one, and the people of the hamlet had been made destitute. Not the least of the sources of sorrow was the information that several of the good men of the place had been carried away prisoners by the Tories, who apparently had not been satisfied with the simple destruction of the houses and the seizure of the flocks and herds. Surely the sufferings of the quiet folk, whose names are never mentioned in our histories, were not far behind those of the brave men who had gone forth to the field of battle at the call of their country.

Bitter as was the grief at the loss of all their possessions, not one of the men displayed the slightest weakening in his purpose to stand by the side he had chosen in the struggle. It is true that the anger at the invaders was intense, but that was far different

from weakly abandoning the contest. Indeed, it seemed to Tom that the air of determination to struggle on to the end was even increased by the horrors of the night which was now gone.

A hurried consultation between the few men and Tom and his companions followed, and it was soon decided to follow the departing bands. No one knew just what could be done, but in their rage and despair it was determined that some attempt at least should be made to retaliate or prevent the marauders from committing other outrages such as those which had been inflicted upon the people of Shrewsbury and Tinton Falls.

Although the line of march which the enemy had followed was not definitely known, it was readily conjectured that they would move towards Red Bank, where a most inviting field would be found for their labors. Accordingly the five men and our three young militiamen started swiftly along the road which it was thought the redcoats had followed.

As they advanced, they discovered that the lonely farmhouses by the roadside had met a fate like that which had befallen Tinton Falls. Smoking ruins and plundered dwellings clearly

indicated the line of march, and each fresh discovery seemed to increase the zeal of the little band of pursuers. Seldom did any one speak, but speech was unnecessary, for each understood the minds of his companions, and a common spirit seemed to possess all.

By the middle of the forenoon signs began to be discovered that the enemy were not far in advance. The number of the pursuers had been increased by the addition of a few men as angry and determined as they and with a similar cause for action arousing their own hearts.

The little party now consisted of a dozen men, all armed and all ready for almost any deed, no matter how desperate. The knowledge that the redcoats were not far in advance caused them to halt and consider some definite line of action.

It was finally decided, after a brief consultation, that they would leave the road, and, passing through the woods, take a position in advance of their foes, and there wait for them to approach. Immediately the plan was acted upon, and, hastening through the forest, after an hour had passed they gained a position near the roadside behind a wall, close up to which the trees were growing. This was

thought to be a safe place, and one which would afford a means of hasty retreat in case that became necessary.

The appearance of the road itself clearly showed that the army had not yet passed, and possessing their souls in patience, the determined little band awaited its approach. Nor did they have long to wait. In a few minutes they perceived a force of soldiers advancing, some on horseback and some on foot. Tom grasped his gun and glanced hastily at his companions. Michael's excitement was evident, but Little Peter was calm and apparently unmindful of danger. Tom wondered at his friend's coolness in such a time, for his own heart was beating rapidly and his gun was shaking in his hands.

His eyes were now fastened upon the advancing soldiers. On and on they came, the road apparently being filled by them. A hundred at least must be in the force they could see, and to check their approach there was only a band of a dozen men concealed behind the wall and the near-by barn, without a leader, and each largely dependent upon his own judgment as to the plan he would follow.

"Let us wait," said one who had come

from Tinton Falls. "This is only the advance, and doubtless we can do more after they have passed us."

Behind the advancing force others could now be seen in the road, and the advice was agreed to. The bleating of sheep and the calls of cattle could also be heard, and the watching men rightly judged that those who had the plunder were now near at hand. Doubtless behind them were other armed men, and between the two divisions of the marauding bands they had evidently thought that the sheep and cattle could be safely guarded.

As the foraging party passed the hiding-place Tom's fingers rested upon the trigger of his gun, and he was almost ready to fire, so angry was he at the sight before him. What a loss was that of the good people of the region! All their labors and savings had been in vain, and now their very possessions were being carried away to feed their enemies, who had not been satisfied with the wanton destruction of their homes.

Close behind the plunderers came the soldiers, and here and there in their ranks Tom discovered some man he recognized as a prisoner. Some of the unfortunate men had their hands bound, and at any sign of halting

were struck with the flat of a sword by some officer.

The sight was maddening and almost more than the excited lad could bear. Again and again he brought his gun to his shoulder, but each time he was restrained by the man nearest him. Why did they wait, he wondered? Surely they had seen enough to warrant speedy action. The ranks which now advanced were more straggling, and no attempt was made to have an orderly march. These men were joined by others, who evidently had been assigned to the duty of scouring the region through which they were advancing, either to look out for plunder or to give warning of the approach of their enemies.

As these lines came nearer, the man nearest Tom, who had now somehow taken upon himself the duty of directing the others, said, "Now let them have it! Give it to them!"

The reports of the guns rang out, and Tom could see that some had fallen in the lines before him. He was too much excited, however, to mark the exact results. He was aware that the redcoats stopped, then rallied, and that one of their officers was leading a detachment of soldiers directly toward the place where he himself was concealed. He

heard his companions running, and somehow perceived that he was left alone. He had been trying to reload his gun, but with the ramrod still in the barrel he hastily ceased and, grasping his rifle, ran as he had never run before, to overtake his friends.

Quickly he was among the trees, and as he gained their shelter he heard the sound of guns behind him and the thud of the bullets as they struck the trees all about him. Stumbling, falling, exerting all his strength, the lad ran on and on into the woods, and at last stopped and listened.

The sounds of pursuit could not be heard. He wanted to call to Michael and Little Peter, but did not dare. He waited and watched, and then when a half hour had passed he slowly and cautiously began to make his way back to the road, for the young soldier had no thought now of returning to the camp.

As he came within sight of the road, he perceived that the redcoats were gone, but he discovered two men before him, and a second glance showed him that they were his two friends.

“Faith ! and that was a fine race o’ yours, me bye,” said Michael, as Tom approached. “It’s two lapes to me one yez could make.”

"I was n't the first one to run," said Tom quietly. "When I looked around for you I could n't find hide nor hair. Where were you, Mike?"

"Bedad, and it 's mesilf can't tell that. Oi know Oi 'm here it is. An' what for do yez fix your gun like that? Is it the stick yer goin' to shoot into the spalpeens? It 's a good shillalah Oi'd be glad to have mesilf."

Tom glanced at his gun as the Irishman spoke and discovered that the ramrod was still in the barrel.

"We 'll load up again, boys, anyhow," he said, and his friends at once followed his example.

"Now we 'll follow the redcoats," said Tom.

"Faith and we will that," said Michael eagerly. "If they 'd only hold still a bit an' give a fellow a chance at 'em, we 'd show 'em how to do the trick. The beggars don't wait a bit, at all, at all."

Neither of the boys was in a mood to listen to Michael's words, however, and they speedily started up the road in the direction in which the redcoats had gone. As they walked on, others of the militia or neighboring farmers joined them, and soon a goodly company was

there, some armed with rifles, others with muskets, while still others had pitchforks or eel-spears. What they lacked in equipment was well supplied by their zeal, and they were ready for action of almost any kind.

All through the hours of the day they followed the British. Sometimes they fired at them from the shelter of walls or trees, sometimes from the road behind. It was a fight not unlike that of which they had heard as having occurred at Concord and Lexington. There were no thoughts of order, and every man was free to act as he thought best.

Frequently the rear guard of the redcoats turned and dispelled "the rebels," but only to have them quickly rally and continue their attacks. Some had fallen, and several times Tom saw wounded or dead men carried away by their comrades. There were too many of the marauders, however, for them to be checked, and leaving the rear guard to deal with their opponents, the main lines held steadily to their way until they arrived at Red Bank.

There scenes similar to those which had been enacted at Shrewsbury and Tinton Falls followed. Houses were burned, after having been plundered, flocks were driven away, pri-

soners were taken whenever the sturdy farmers dared to stand and attempt to defend their possessions, and the destruction and desolation were beyond the power of words to describe.

Still the hardy men of Old Monmouth did not abandon their desultory attacks upon their enemies. From behind fences, from the woods by the roadside, from any and every place that afforded protection, they poured their fire upon the redcoats, who were, however, too strong in numbers to be routed or compelled to abandon the expedition upon which they had entered. Well laden with plunder, with an ever-increasing drove of cattle, they at last turned from Red Bank and began their march back to Refugee Town on the Hook, where they had first landed, and where boats were now awaiting their return.

Then the anger of Monmouth men began to burn still more fiercely. Their numbers had increased by this time, and the redcoats were constantly compelled to turn and defend themselves and the plunder they had taken. Tom Coward had long since been separated from his two friends. His powder-horn was now empty and his bullet-pouch as well. For the last time he had loaded his rifle, and was determined that the final shot should tell.

He was alone. Before him farther down the road he could hear the sound of the guns, and knew that the contest was still being waged. Quickening his pace, he started swiftly to overtake the men in advance of him, and soon beheld the straggling lines of redcoats. Coming still nearer, he dropped upon one knee, raised his gun to his shoulder, and, taking careful aim, fired at the men who were not far away. At the same time he heard the sounds of other shots and saw the soldiers halt, then quickly form, and a band start swiftly back along the road directly towards the place where he himself was.

Instantly he turned and ran, thinking that when he had gone a short distance the pursuit would be abandoned as it had been before. He was running swiftly, hoping to put as great a distance as possible between him and his enemies, when he was surprised to see a band of horsemen directly before him. It required only one glance to show that they were redcoats, and the startled lad knew that he was caught between the lines, for doubtless the mounted men had dropped back for the very purpose of cutting off the retreat of some of the attacking party.

Before he could leave the road the men

were upon him. Flight and resistance were alike useless now, and with a heavy heart Tom realized that there was no escape for him. In a moment the soldiers encircled him; one leaped from his horse and rudely seized his gun and lifted it to strike him with the butt.

“Hold on there,” called one of the men. “The fellow’s surrendered. Don’t hit him. Send him to Colonel Coward; he has charge of all the prisoners now.”

In a moment the men dashed past him, and hardly realizing what had occurred Tom obeyed the soldier who roughly ordered him to advance.

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CHAPTER XXI

COLONEL TYE'S PROPOSITION

THE long march on the preceding day, the loss of sleep in the night now gone, and the constant struggle and excitement which had not relaxed for a moment since sunrise, had combined almost to exhaust Tom Coward; but the first sensation of weariness he felt was when he started in the company of the soldiers to join the redcoats. His gun had been taken from him, and his utter helplessness for the first time became apparent.

Footsore, wretched, and forlorn, the weary lad did not feel that he could make an effort to escape if an opportunity should present itself, an occurrence not in the least likely. He was somehow conscious that the sounds of the guns had ceased, and was also aware that Refugee Town now was not far away, but neither of these facts made much of an impression upon his mind. He was a prisoner, and that of itself was sufficient to banish all other thoughts. Still he had not forgotten

the word of the officer that the prisoners were to be in charge of Colonel Coward, and the one hope that he soon might meet the man whom he was so desirous of seeing was the the only remaining source of comfort.

It was dark when they arrived at the town, and the motley crowd appeared to be well satisfied with the efforts of the day. It was true that a number of their men had been killed by the militia and a much larger number wounded, but in the main the expedition had been successful and the marauders were content. Redcoats, Tories, pine-robbers, and blacks were there, and for the time mingled in apparent familiarity. Horses, cattle, and sheep had been secured in considerable numbers, and it soon became evident what was to be done with the booty.

Weary as Tom was, he was not to be permitted to sleep that night, and, with others of the prisoners and many of the refugees, was busied in the slaughter of the animals. The disgusting occupation continued until sunrise, and then the horses were taken on board the waiting vessels, the carcasses of the slaughtered cattle and sheep were also received, and preparations for departure were made by the redcoats and Tories who had come from New York.

Tom was too weary to take much interest in the final labors, and even the mysterious colonel was for the moment forgotten. He was told that he might eat his breakfast and then retire to one of the huts if he desired, and at once accepting the invitation he soon was sleeping as only an exhausted man can.

How long he slept he did not know, but he was awakened by the voice of some one speaking to him, and sitting quickly erect he beheld Colonel Tye standing before him in the doorway.

"What is it, Tye?" he said as he sprang to his feet. "What are you doing here?"

The mulatto grinned good-naturedly as he replied, —

"Tye come to wake you up. Sleep long enough. Most dark now."

"What? You don't mean to say it's night?"

"Most dark. You sleep all day. Hard work to fight."

"Tye, were you with the redcoats yesterday? Did you help them?"

The black man nodded his head.

"What did you do it for? And were all your men with them? How could you do it, Tye? How could you stand by and see them

burn the houses of men you had known all your life? I would n't have believed it of you."

Colonel Tye's face became hard and he was silent a moment before he said, —

"What for you think Tye fight? What is Tye? What the men of Monmouth call him? What they call him?" he added fiercely, as he peered into Tom's face.

"I suppose they call you a slave, Titus."

"Yes, slave. Slave! What for the men here fight the redcoats?" he added fiercely.

"Why, you know as well as I do what they're fighting for. They're fighting for their lives and their homes. They're fighting for their freedom."

"That what Tye fighting for, too. He fight for to be free. He fight for life. He fight for home. If men here succeed what they do with Titus? What they do?" he added still more fiercely.

"I don't know. I suppose they'd think you belonged here, as you do."

"No belong here. Never belong to John Corlies again! Tye be slave? Tye never be slave again, never! Redcoats tell Tye he be free if help them. Men here say Tye be slave if help them. Who you think Tye

help? Men here say they fight for to be free. So Tye fight to be free too. Help redcoats, that what Tye do!"

Tom could find no words with which to reply, and perhaps he felt the force of the slave's reasoning. Certainly Titus was in earnest, and the manner in which he used the very arguments advanced by the men of Old Monmouth to justify the struggle against the forces of King George was not without its weight upon his hearer; but Tom had no thought of the slaves as sharing in the feelings of his neighbors, and so he could not understand the motives which actuated Titus.

"Tell me, Tye," he said, changing the subject, "where's this Colonel Coward who has charge of the prisoners? Did you come to take me to him?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Titus, his anger apparently having instantly departed. "He gone. He gone long time ago. He take Mistah Cowenhoven and all the prisoners with him. He in New York long time ago."

"When am I to go?" said Tom slowly.

"You not go. You stay here. Tye fix that" —

"Not to go? You fixed it? What do you mean, Tye?"

"Jus' what say. Tye make special request that boy be left here. They not care. Don' want boy anyway; got prisoners enough without him. You stay here and help Tye. Tye let you go home maybe by and by."

The black glanced shrewdly at him as he spoke, and Tom suspected there was more behind his words which he had not yet heard.

"Tell me what you have to say, Tye," he said quietly.

"Tye tell you, course he tell you. You know Cap'n Huddy," and his dark eyes flashed as he spoke. "Cap'n Huddy hang Stephen Edwards. Cap'n Huddy pull rope with his own hands. Stephen Edwards love Tye. He good to slave. He tell Tye he help him free. Bes' friend Tye eber had. Now Stephen Edwards dead, an' who kill him? Tell me, who kill him?"

The slave's anger had returned, and Tom could see that he was almost beside himself with rage. The lad wisely held his peace, and in a moment Titus resumed.

"Now who pay Cap'n Huddy for that? Who pay him? Tye do it, that who, an' you help! Tye go to Colonel Coward an' say he want boy to stay an' help catch Cap'n Huddy. Now you free if you go back to camp and do

what Tye tell you. You see Cap'n Huddy. You tell him you git away an' know where Tye and more black men goin'. They goin' to stop by Falk'berg's tavern. Then Cap'n Huddy go there to catch black men, but black men catch him! You see? Then Cap'n Huddy know how Stephen Edwards feel when he pull that rope. You do dat an' you free."

"What you want of me, as I understand it then, is to go back to Toms River and help you get Captain Huddy. Then if I'll do that I shall be free, shall I?"

"Yes, yes! That it, that it!" replied Tye with eagerness.

"You black rascal!" exclaimed Tom, his anger sweeping away all his caution in a moment. "I'll see you hanged yourself first!"

"Better be careful," said Tye calmly. "Sarah need you. Little Peter need you, Little Peter's little brothers need you. All need you."

"I don't care who needs me, I'll never do it! I'd rather be strung up myself than help you in such a piece of work! You'd better be careful yourself, Tye. Captain Huddy has got an arm like steel, and if he once got hold of you I think you'd know who'd do

the hanging. You'd better leave him alone if you know when you are well off, Tye."

The black man's eyes snapped, but controlling himself he said quietly, —

"Cap'n Huddy welcome to do dat if he can. Tye tell you 'bout Colonel Coward; Tye know all 'bout him, and know what you want to know, too."

"Tell me then," said Tom quickly.

"You do what I say?" said Tye eagerly. "You help Tye get Cap'n Huddy?"

"Never, you black rascal! Never! Get out of here! Leave me alone!"

"You wish Tye had n't left you," said the black savagely as he turned away. "You change your mind pretty quick, but too late then."

Left to himself, for a time Tom's anger served to keep up his spirits, but as the darkness came on his feeling of despondency returned. Here he was a prisoner in Refugee Town, among the vilest and lowest men Old Monmouth had ever known. Escaped slaves, felons, desperadoes of all classes were there, and he could expect little mercy at their hands. Doubtless, too, Tye in his rage would see to it that his lot was not made a pleasant one. Perhaps they might even treat him as

the black leader was so desirous of treating the doughty captain of the militia. No one would ever be the wiser if they should; and the longer he thought of his condition the more desperate it seemed to the troubled young soldier. The sugar house in New York would doubtless be preferable to his lot in the camp, and he wished with all his heart that he had been sent there.

He was hungry, but he dared not venture out of the hut. The darkness became deeper, and the noisy shouts of the men all about him could be heard.

At last he stretched himself upon the floor and tried to sleep again, but thoughts of Little Peter and Michael drove away all his attempts. And there was Captain Huddy, too. Would Tye succeed in his efforts to take him? His fears for the leader, however, were the least of all; for he could be trusted to take care of himself, even from such desperate attempts as Colonel Tye might make against him.

The noise of the town at last subsided and Tom slept. He was awake before it was light, but he was not left long to meditate even upon his own sad thoughts. A black man entered the room and bade him come forth.

Tom followed and soon discovered what was expected of him. He was to assist in the cooking ; and making the best of his misfortunes he at once obeyed the rough summons and entered upon his task, a task from which he found little relief as the days passed.

Colonel Tye was gone, but he had left word with his fellows, which they were not slow to heed, and Tom Coward found his lot anything but a happy one. Indeed, the men seemed to take an especial delight in ordering him to his tasks. Perhaps the fact that they had known what it was to be ordered by their masters made them all the more brutal now that they had some one whom they themselves could order about. At all events Tom soon learned that he was at the beck and call of any and every one in the place.

The hope of escaping had been strong when he had first been taken, but as the weary days passed and he discovered that a constant watch was maintained, gradually a feeling of despair crept over him until at last he began almost to fear that he never was to find release.

A few weeks after his capture another "picarooning" expedition was made into Old Monmouth, for so the marauders termed their

incursions, this time only about two hundred men coming down from New York. These men took about all that those in the former raid had left behind them, and departed for the city satisfied alike with their store of plunder and with the impression they must have left upon the patriots of the old county.

Frequently the British sailors stopped at the town, and occasionally officers from the redcoats in New York were seen; but Tom never knew just what their errands were, although it required but little conjecturing to know that they boded no good to Old Monmouth.

The leaders of the pine-robbers also visited the spot at times, and conferred with the men in command. Moody had come and so had Bacon and Davenport, and once Tom saw Giberson there. He laughed good-naturedly when he discovered the young prisoner, and bade him keep up his heart, for it all was a part of the war. He bore no ill-will for the "trick" which had been played upon him, and declared that Tom must not "whine" now that his turn had come, a piece of advice which was much more blessed to give than to receive.

The summer passed, the winter came on,

and still Tom was kept in the camp at Refugee Town. He heard but little of the occurrences in the outside world, although there were rumors that the British had succeeded in gaining possession of the entire state of Georgia. There were stories of the attack upon Savannah, of the crushing defeat of General Lincoln, and of the departure of the French fleet for the West Indies, and from the elation displayed by the men about him he had little doubt of their truth. Not a word was said about the American success at Stony Point or of the movements or whereabouts of Washington, although the incursions of the British into Connecticut, not unlike those they had made into Old Monmouth, were related with great gusto. Of news of his own friends or of the movements in the immediate region he heard not a word.

So the summer came again, and still Tom was held in Refugee Town. Once he had attempted to escape but had failed, and as he was told that another effort would make Stephen Edwards' fate his own, he had almost given up all hopes and settled down into a condition bordering upon despair. Not once had he been permitted to go beyond the limits of the camp.

It was now early in the summer, and one morning Tom was surprised as he beheld Colonel Tye again in the camp, the first time he had seen him since that interview now so many months away. His surprise was still further increased when he was ordered to take his place in a whale-boat with a dozen other men, Colonel Tye himself being among the number, and they began to row down the shore. The men were silent, and Tom could form no idea as to what their destination was to be, nor could he understand why he had been selected to go.

There was nothing to be done but obey, and so he pulled steadily at his oar, until about two hours had passed, when the men landed, and after concealing their boat started across the country.

The men marched quietly, and it was evident that they were making all efforts to escape observation; but Tom began to suspect now what their destination was to be. His fears were confirmed when at last the band halted, and before him Tom could see the lowly home of Captain Huddy.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ATTACK UPON CAPTAIN HUDDY

ALL of the party except Tom were armed, and why he had been brought he still could not conjecture. His thoughts were so busied with the movements of his companions that he had no time for questioning any one, and indeed he knew that slight attention would have been given him in any event.

Tye and one of the band now withdrew into the woods and soon returned accompanied by twenty or more negroes and white men, and from their appearance Tom knew at once they were engaged in the same errand upon which his own companions had come. Still no advance was made, and although a careful watch was kept upon Captain Huddy's house no one appeared to expect an immediate attack.

During the night others joined the silent company, and at sunrise at least sixty men were in the motley party. It speedily became evident that something was about to be done.

The men all approached the borders of the woods, and Tye and a companion advanced in the open space waving a flag of truce, which consisted of a piece of cloth, supposedly white at one time, and now waved aloft on the barrel of a gun.

They had advanced but a few steps when some one shouted from the house, and Tom recognized the voice as that of Captain Huddy himself.

"Stop where you are! What is your errand?"

"We want Captain Huddy," shouted Tye. "Give him up and no man fire."

"I'm Captain Huddy, myself. If you want me, come and get me."

"Better give up, Cap'n. We know you there and come to get you. Save a heap o' trouble if you come 'long quiet. Better give up now!"

"I'll give you something with Captain Huddy's compliments if you don't get out of this. I'll give you till I count three to clear out."

Tye and his companions glanced behind them, but did not stir from their position. It was plain that they desired to prolong the interview.

“One!” shouted the captain. “Two. Now leave before I say three.” Still Tye did not move. “Three,” called Captain Huddy again, and a moment later there was a flash, a puff of smoke, and the report of his rifle rang out.

Then Tye and his companion instantly turned and sought the shelter of the woods, but the black man showed that he had been wounded and one arm was hanging helpless by his side.

The attack on the house now began in earnest. Colonel Tye’s men were so stationed that they encircled the building, but discreetly remained within the border of the woods. Again and again their guns rang out. They fired at the windows and the doors, but as yet no one had ventured into the open space nor had another shot been fired by the defenders of the place.

The marauders now became bolder and a few of them incautiously left the shelter of the trees, but they hastily returned when a rifle was discharged from one of the windows and another instantly followed it. One of the men had fallen, and another was so badly wounded that it was with the greatest difficulty he crawled back among his companions.

The attack was then renewed with increased vigor. Upon the front, the rear, the sides of the building they poured their shot, and those who were within were not idle. From the windows there came sharp and quick reports, although no volleys were fired. Tom conjectured that the defenders were reserving their ammunition and were determined to make every shot tell. He had no means of knowing how many men were in the house, but it was evident from the rapidity with which the guns were discharged, and the various windows from which the reports were heard, that a sturdy defense would be made.

Tom watched the contest with breathless interest. Unable to take part in the ~~s~~tege himself, he was almost as much excited over the prospect of escape from Tye's men as he was at the outcome of the attack itself. He had been ordered to remain in one position, and he had not yet dared to move from it. Behind him and on every side except the front were armed men, who would not hesitate to shoot him at the first sign of an attempt to run.

Meanwhile the attack continued without cessation. Colonel Tye moved about among

his men, giving directions here and there and cheering them by his own apparent recklessness. His helpless arm was disregarded, though his face betrayed the intense pain he was suffering. Still undaunted, he relaxed none of his efforts, and an almost steady fire was kept up. The attack was directed against the windows for the most part, and as there were five of these on the second floor in the front of the house, and three on the ground floor in addition to the two doors, a large part of the men were kept busy there. Apparently regardless of danger, the besieged men fired from one window after another, never discharging more than one gun at a time and seldom failing to do some execution.

The summer sun climbed higher in the heavens, the heat became more and more intense, and still the attack continued. At noontime there was, as if by mutual consent, a brief cessation, but the attack was soon resumed. Colonel Tye apparently was not prepared for the stubborn defense, but he became more and more determined as the hours passed. Several of his men had been killed, others had been wounded, and many were demanding that they should be permitted to return to the boats, declaring that

it was impossible to dislodge the defenders of the house.

The mulatto leader perceived that something must be done quickly now or he must yield to the demands of his followers. It had been several minutes since a gun had been fired from the front of the house, and with the hope that the end had come Tye called upon his men to follow him, and with a score or more at his heels started swiftly across the open space toward one of the doors.

All the other men instantly ceased firing and breathlessly watched their companions as they made for the house. Tom forgot all about his project of escaping as he leaned forward and gazed at the running men. Others had also started and were crouching low and dodging about as they tried to make their way to the little lean-to which was on one side of the captain's house ; and the excited young prisoner instantly perceived that their plan was to set fire to that, while their companions were drawing all the attention of those within to themselves.

Nearer and nearer came the men, and still no gun was heard. They were almost upon the steps now, and Tom expected every moment to hear a volley fired at the deter-

mined band, but not a sound broke in upon the stillness of the summer day. For a moment it almost seemed as if his heart had stopped beating. Why did they not shoot? Could they not see that the marauders were almost upon them and in a moment it would be too late to drive them back? Tom felt as if he must shout and warn them of their danger. Indeed, he had started forward from his position behind the trees; when he suddenly stopped and gave one quick look at the house as if he could not believe what he saw.

The door was suddenly thrown open and Captain Huddy stood before the men, unarmed and alone. For a moment the attacking party were so startled by the unexpected appearance of the man they were seeking that they stopped and gazed blankly at him. No one spoke and Captain Huddy did not move from his position in the doorway. He had no hat on his head and wore no coat. His very appearance seemed for the moment to overawe the desperadoes.

Quickly Colonel Tye's followers recovered from their confusion, and with a yell rushed upon the defenseless man, and carrying him with them into the house disappeared from the

sight of those without. With a heavy sigh, and thinking now that the end had come, Tom turned and glanced about him to take advantage of the moment and try to make his own escape from the region. Two men were close behind him, he quickly discovered, and as they were both armed he groaned as he perceived that his efforts would be useless.

He was recalled to the scene before him by the return of the men from the house. Captain Huddy was in their midst, and by his side a young girl of about his own age whom he instantly recognized as Lucretia Emmons. But where were the other defenders?

The men beside him now bade him move forward with them and join the noisy group which surrounded the brave captain; and nothing loath Tom was soon in the midst of the crowd. The men were angry and stood shaking their fists at their prisoners. The captain was calm, almost disdainful, and seemed to be giving all his attention to the girl by his side, whose terror was as real as it was pathetic.

Tye now raised his hand in token of silence, and the motley assembly partly subsided. Then turning to the captain the leader said sternly, "Where other men, Cap'n Huddy? Where they go? Where they now?"

"There are no other men here, you black rascal."

Tye stared at him a moment and then said, "Better tell me where they are. Tye help you tell if you don't speak now."

"There are no other men here, I tell you. If there were, do you suppose I'd let you know where they are? I'm the only man who's been in my house for three days. There were twenty here last Monday, but they all left, and I've been alone ever since, that is, alone except for my brave serving girl here." And as he spoke he placed his hand on the shoulder of the trembling girl as if he would bid her to keep up her courage.

A yell of derision greeted his words, and there were cries of "Hang him! Shoot him! Kill the wench! Make him tell where the other men are!"

For a moment it seemed as if Captain Huddy's last moment had come; but Tye quickly placed himself in front of the prisoners and said to the angry men, "Keep back. We treat Cap'n Huddy fair now. By and by we show him how Stephen Edwards feel, but not yet. Keep back! Keep back!"

The men heeded the command, moved perhaps as much by the ghastly expression of

Tye's face as by his words, for it was plain that the black man was suffering intense pain from his wound.

"Now, Captain Huddy," said Tye, as the threatened movement subsided, "you tell how you fire from all sides of the house, if you alone."

"I don't mind telling you that," said the captain quietly, and apparently unmoved by his danger. "When my men went away they left twenty good rifles in the house. This girl kept loading them for me and I kept firing them. And not in vain, I think," he added, glancing significantly at the arm of the mulatto. "I jumped from one window to another and Lucretia kept handing me the guns just as fast as she could load them and I turned over the loads to you. I'd have kept it up till the fourth of July if my bullets had n't given out. As it is I think I've left you something to remember me by. Now do your worst; I'm not afraid of you or of all the rascally blacks and outlaws in Old Monmouth."

The habit of long-continued obedience had not entirely departed from the ex-slave, and for a moment he looked blankly at the undaunted prisoner. All his companions

appeared to be similarly affected, but quickly their feeling of rage returned, increased by the calmness of the captain and the knowledge that they had so long been held at bay by one man.

Moved as by a common impulse, they rushed upon the prisoners, shouting, "Kill him! Kill him! String up the wench! Hang the rebel!"

It would have fared ill with the undaunted leader in the militia of Old Monmouth then, if the attention of the men had not suddenly been drawn to Tye himself.

The mulatto had fallen to the ground and lay stretched before them apparently lifeless. Instantly his companions lifted and bent over him to discover whether life was really gone or not. A dash of water revived the fainting man, and they tenderly bore him into the house, while for the moment even the prisoners were forgotten in the excitement.

Tye was soon restored, but it was decided that the entire party should remain in the house for the night and not return to the boats until the following day. The prisoners were carefully guarded, and Tom Coward could find no opportunity of speaking to them, though he remained awake all night.

In the early light of the morning the men started on their return to the shore. Lucretia Emmons, by Tye's strict orders, was left behind, and the mulatto himself seemed to be stronger, though his face was still almost ashen in its color.

The men moved swiftly through the woods, Tye marching bravely by Captain Huddy's side and ready to protect him from the violence of his followers. It was seldom any one spoke, and all were equally eager to gain the boats and the shelter of the camp at Refugee Town.

At last they approached the shore and quickly drew the boats forth from their places of concealment. All were working with desperate haste now, and soon every boat had been launched and filled.

As the men took up their oars, they were startled by a loud shout from the beach, and, looking up, discovered a band of men running swiftly towards them. One glance was sufficient to show that the militia were upon them, and no bidding was needed to make every one put forth all his strength.

The long narrow boats were moving swiftly by this time, and all were satisfied that they would escape, when suddenly Captain Huddy,

with one quick leap, was over the side of the boat in which he had been seated, and plunged into the water. For a moment the startled men rested on their oars and watched for the appearance of the fearless man.

At last he could be seen far behind them, and as the men seized their guns to fire at him a sudden volley rang out from the men on the shore.

Tom, who had been eagerly watching for Captain Huddy's head to appear, was horrified when he saw him sink, then rise again to the surface, and shout, "I am Huddy! I am Huddy!"

Doubtless he had been wounded by his friends and was calling to them, but the lad's attention was instantly recalled to his own boat. An exclamation from one of the men caused him to look quickly at Tye. The mulatto had slipped from his seat, and upon the bottom of the boat was lying still. His jaws were set, and his rigid limbs betrayed the fact that this time it was apparently more than a faint which had seized the mulatto leader, Colonel Tye.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RACE OF THE WHALE-BOATS

COLONEL TYE was dead. The rigid features and stiffened limbs would have revealed the fact at once to his companions had they stopped to examine; but all other thoughts were ignored in their haste to get beyond the range of the muskets of the militia on the shore. Tom Coward pulled with the best of them; for glad as he would have been to be among his friends once more, there was as much danger from a gun fired by the friends of the congress as by those of the king, and the one thought uppermost in his mind now was to place himself beyond the present peril.

He could see that Captain Huddy had been rescued, and as he perceived him standing in the group on the shore he concluded that the officer could not have been severely wounded. No attempt was made to pursue the whale-boats, and soon they had gained a position from which the militia could no longer be seen. Then the men rested on their oars, and

for the first time gave their attention to Colonel Tye.

It required only a hasty examination to reveal the fact that life was already extinct. The face of the dead leader was ghastly, and even his brutal companions were not unmoved by the sight. How strange the event had been, Tom thought. Here was Colonel Tye, who had been bent upon the death of Captain Huddy, but instead had lost his own life at the hands of the man he had so long pursued.

There was no time, however, for dwelling upon such thoughts, for a hasty consultation between the men followed, and soon it was decided that the body should not be taken back to Refugee Town for fear that its presence there would weaken the zeal of some of the blacks.

Accordingly, after rowing a few miles farther up the shore, two of the boats were headed for the beach, the body of the dead mulatto was lifted from its place, and then the whale-boat in which Tom was seated was ordered to proceed on its way to the town, while the crews of the others remained to bury the corpse of the ex-slave, Titus.

A feeling of gloom settled over the men as

they resumed their labors. The attempt to capture Captain Huddy had failed, the prisoner had escaped, and now to crown all Colonel Tye had fallen. Titus had had many friends among the refugees, and indeed among his enemies he was not regarded as quite so bad as some of the other leaders. Revengeful and determined he had been, but never as cruel as Bacon or Moody or Davenport. His was the black skin, but theirs was the blacker heart. Indeed, to-day it is recognized that Colonel Tye, after his own fashion, was contending for his liberty. His zeal was not according to knowledge, but then the ex-slave was not supposed to possess very much of that, and so must be judged not by that which he had not, but by that which he had.

At all events he was dead, and never again would show mercy to a foe or pursue his enemies to their death. His loss would be a severe one among the outlaws, for no one possessed so much influence over the blacks or had so many means of gaining information from the interior of the country as he.

Tom Coward was not grieving so much over the death of the outlaw as he was over his own sad position. Never before had he so longed to be among his friends again. His

heart rebelled against his surroundings, and as he glanced at the brutal faces of the men in the whale-boat it seemed to him he could not endure another night in their company. For a long time he had been almost hopeless of escaping, so carefully and constantly was he watched; but now, after having seen Captain Huddy again and witnessing his reckless daring, he was resolved, come what might, that he would no longer remain among the desperadoes in the motley crowd on Sandy Hook. Even death was to be preferred to that, and Captain Huddy had been right when he had said there was almost no one to mourn if he should fall.

The young prisoner's gloomy meditations were suddenly interrupted by an exclamation from one of his companions, and looking quickly behind him Tom beheld a whale-boat longer and larger than the one in which he was seated, bearing directly down upon them. It was filled with men, and the first thought had been that a company from Refugee Town was coming to meet them. A second glance speedily dispelled that thought, for there had been no such boat there, and certainly none which was handled with such rare skill.

Swift as a race-horse, the long narrow boat

sped over the waves, and there could be no doubt as to its destination, for it was headed directly towards them.

Tom's boat was quickly turned about; but there was to be no escape, for now from the opposite direction another whale-boat, as long and as well manned as the other, was seen approaching. The refugees had been rounding a little point on the shore, and doubtless had been seen by the watching men who had waited for them to pass, and then ventured forth, bent upon catching them between the two forces. But the determined men were not yet ready to give up. Instantly the course was changed, and directly toward the open sea they were rowing with desperate haste.

As the whale-boat rose on the crests of the waves, it was easily perceived that the others were rapidly gaining upon it. With powerful strokes the pursuing boats were sent forward, and it was soon known that there could be no escape from them, though the men still tugged at their oars and bent to their tasks. The perspiration streamed from their faces and the muscles in their bared arms stood out like whipcords, but their efforts were useless. Nearer and nearer swept those swift boats, and soon there came a hail from one of them to stop.

No heed was given the call, however, and the hopeless race was continued. With every stroke the pursuers drew nearer, and when at last one of the men was seen to take his stand by the little brass cannon in the bow and once more call upon the refugees to stop, the men in the boat with Tom sullenly obeyed and backed water.

Tom's heart was beating high with hope now. He had no means of knowing who the pursuers were, but capture in any event meant release for him, and he was eagerly awaiting the outcome of the novel race.

Swiftly the two boats drew alongside, and greatly to Tom's delight and astonishment he beheld Captain Adam Hyler seated in the stern of one of them. Now he was safe indeed, he thought, but he would not speak, for fear that the well-known leader would not recognize him amidst such surroundings.

The gruff-voiced captain now rose and bade the men hand over their guns. As soon as they had been received, he ordered the boat to proceed in advance of his own toward the shore. No time was wasted in explanations, and soon all three of the boats grounded and the men stood on the sand, the refugees sullen and striving to appear indifferent, and their

captors as quiet and unconcerned as if the seizure of a whale-boat, manned by outlaws or Tories, was a matter of every day occurrence.

Captain Hyler at once gave directions for the disposal of the prisoners. The men were to be marched inland and the boat retained where it then was. A detachment was to accompany the prisoners, and as preparations to depart were instantly made, Tom was becoming desperate. He had found no opportunity as yet of speaking to the captain, and he began to fear that none would be given.

"Captain Hyler! Captain Hyler!" he called suddenly, "don't you know me?"

The captain looked up as he heard the call, and advancing a little nearer the prisoner who had so unexpectedly hailed him, peered keenly at him for a moment, and then said gruffly, "Yes, I know you. If I'm not mistaken you're the lad who came aboard the *Success* when I took her off Shark River."

"Yes, I am. And I'm a prisoner now. Don't send me off with these men! Give me a chance and I'll tell you all about it."

"You stay here," said Captain Hyler; then turning to those who had the prisoners in charge he ordered them to start at once for

the nearest camp of the militia and return to the shore as speedily as possible.

"I'll hear ye pretty soon, lad," he said to Tom. "First, we'll look to these boats and then I'll give you a chance with your story."

At the word of the leader the light whale-boats were lifted by his men and carried up the bank, where they were concealed in the bushes. A guard was then stationed, and all the others, Tom among them, turned and entered the woods. They had not advanced far before they came to a little clearing in which stood several huts, not unlike Giber-son's nest in their appearance. A wide fire-place had been built in the centre of the open space, and some of the men speedily began to prepare their supper.

While these preparations were going on, Captain Hyler had called Tom into one of the huts and, after seating himself, bade him relate his story.

And Tom, nothing loath, soon told this hearer all his tale, including the attack on Captain Huddy at his home at Colt's Neck and the death of Colonel Tye. Captain Hyler did not speak before Tom had finished, and then sat silently regarding him for a brief time.

Uneasy at the silence and beginning to fear that the captain did not believe his words, Tom knew not what to say; but wisely concluding to do what is ever the best thing under such circumstances, held his peace and waited.

“Then Tye is dead, is he?” said Captain Hyler at last. “Well, he was n’t the worst one o’ them refugees. It’s ’most always so though, the worst escape and the best are shot. Maybe that’s the reason I have n’t had a scratch myself since the war began.”

He did not smile, and Tom could not determine whether he was speaking soberly or not.

“As for Captain Josh Huddy, they might have known better than to try to touch him. What could such a fellow as Tye do against him?”

“He was a powerful fellow,” said Tom quietly.

“’Tis n’t a question o’ strength, it’s a question o’ heads. Josh Huddy forgot more than Tye could ever learn. He ought to have known more than to pit himself against that man. He’s got what he deserves. What made you stay so long in Refugee Town?” he added abruptly.

"I had to."

"Had to? Had to? Josh Huddy did n't have to stay in that whale-boat after they took him, did he? Had to? Had to? I don't know what you mean!"

"I tried to get away," replied Tom, feeling somehow as if he had been guilty of a crime. The deep gruff voice of the captain and his apparent anger were sadly confusing, and Tom's cheeks were red with shame.

"Tried to? Why did n't you *get* away, I'd like to know? Do you think they'd hold me there very long if they had a chance?"

"Not very."

"No, I don't think they would, and what's more, I've decided to give the rascals a chance to try it. What are you going to do now, lad?"

"I'm going back to join the militia just as soon as I can get there. I did n't want to join very much when I went in, but now I'm ready to stay till the war's ended."

"That's the way to talk. We're all going to stay till the end. Stand up, boy."

Tom rose obediently, wondering what was to be done now. Captain Hyler also rose, and approaching Tom felt of his arms and

gave him a critical inspection. At last, when he had completed the examination, he seated himself once more, and regarding the confused lad intently, said, "Huh! I don't know but you'll do. In fact, I rather think you will."

As Tom did not understand what the gruff captain meant, he only stared at him and made no reply.

"My men's all picked, and I have to be sure I can depend on every one before I let him come along with me. Now, young man, the militia's not the place for you. You must join my band."

"When?" inquired Tom, as if the matter was already settled.

"When? Now! When did you think I meant? After you are as old as Methuselah? No, sir! Now's the time. It'll be no play soldier, let me tell you, for it's going to be such work as was never heard of afore in Old Monmouth. I'm going to make myself felt from the Raritan to Egg Harbor. I'm planning to have a fleet o' whale-boats such as the world has never seen. My men are to work all winter on 'em, and by next spring we're going to be ready to strike anything, from a man-o'-war to a dory,

that dares show its head on this 'ere shore. It's going to be dangerous work, young man. Every man must be ready to take his life in his hands that comes along with me. Want to back out now, lad?"

"No, I want to go with you. I'd rather be with you than with any other man in Old Monmouth. I don't know that I can do much, but I'll do what I can, Captain Hyler, I'll promise you that!"

"That's the way to talk, lad!"

"But first, if you don't mind, I'd like to go back home and see them there. You know I've been gone a long time, and I don't know what has happened. I'd like to see Captain Huddy and tell him about it, too."

"Never you mind Josh Huddy, I'll 'tend to him. But go 'long home if you want to, only come back by next week. That's all I want."

"Shall I come here?"

"Yes; only if we are n't here come up the Raritan to Brunswick. We'll have some supper now if you don't object."

Tom did not object, and the welcome he received from the men warmed his young heart, when they learned that he was to be one of their number.

Early on the following morning he set forth on his journey to the house of Benzeor Osburn, and eager as he was to see or hear from his friends again, he was in no wise prepared for the sight which he saw when he entered upon the familiar grounds.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN FAMILIAR PLACES

NOT a building was standing. Heaps of ashes and charred timbers marked the places where once the house and barns had been ; but their appearance clearly indicated that the fires must have occurred many weeks before this time. Desolation and ruin were all about him, and for a moment Tom could only gaze in astonishment. The only home he had ever known had been Benzeor Osburn's, and now that had disappeared, and all that remained were the ruins to indicate the fearful nature of the struggle which for years had been going on in Old Monmouth, and which instead of coming to a speedy end gave every indication that it might last for years to come.

The weeds that fringed the foundations of what once had been the house were rank and tall, and it was apparent that the entire place had been neglected and long since abandoned. The little field where the garden had been was overgrown with creepers, and the very

paths were concealed from his sight. Altogether the sight was almost more than Tom Coward could endure ; and as he thought of the many good times he had had there and the never failing kindness of Sarah and her mother, his heart was stirred by a great throb of pity for them.

The thought of his friends served to recall him to the immediate problem before him. Where were they now ? And Little Peter and his younger brothers and sisters, where were they ? He turned and looked about him as if he must see them somewhere near. But the scene of desolation was unbroken by the sight of any human being. The noisy crows were calling in the distance as if they had no fears now of being attacked by their common enemy, and the rabbits had even dared to burrow under the rude foundations of the barn. Not a sight nor a sound relieved the depression in Tom's heart. He was alone, and for all that he knew he might be the only one left alive of all those who a few short years before had dwelt together in peace and happiness in the familiar place.

Suddenly Tom started and peered intently at the border of the near-by forest. Surely that was a man he had seen crouching low

and creeping from tree to tree. The young soldier was unarmed, for the rifle he had formerly carried had been taken from him immediately after his capture and no weapon had been given him in its place. His feeling of loneliness and the consciousness that he had no means of protecting himself caused Tom to turn, and he was about to withdraw from the place quietly and without attracting the attention of the stranger, if possible, when he again stopped as he once more observed the man, this time coming forth from the woods and approaching the very place where he himself was standing.

A second glance in a measure restored something of Tom's confidence, for surely, he thought, he recognized the man. It was Abe, the black slave of Benzeor. The black evidently had not discovered his presence yet, and in the reaction which had speedily come in his own feelings Tom ran eagerly forward and shouted as he ran.

"Abe! Abe!" he called. "Come here! Come here! Wait for me!"

His last appeal had been called forth by the unexpected actions of Abe. The slave had stopped as he heard his name, and giving one glance of terror at the man who had so

unexpectedly appeared upon the scene had then turned and run towards the woods again as if satisfied that all the foes of Old Monmouth were pursuing him and his only hope of escape lay in the swiftness of his flight.

Perhaps under other circumstances Tom might have felt inclined to laugh at the manifest terror of the black man, who with leaps that might have done credit to a modern college athlete was rushing over the rough field, never once stopping to look behind him. Nor was Tom with all his efforts able to overtake the fleeing negro, and at last fearful that Abe would disappear without his being able to learn from him anything as to the whereabouts of Little Peter and Sarah, he stopped and, placing his hands about his mouth, shouted again.

“Abe! Stop! Wait for me! Wait, I say! Wait!”

Still Abe did not stop, and even strove to increase his efforts; but in his haste he suddenly stumbled and fell.

Taking advantage of the momentary break, Tom once more called: “Abe! Hold on! It’s Tom! It’s Tom Coward!”

This time the frightened negro looked behind him. He had not yet risen, and as

.

upon his knees he peered at the man who had hailed him, he evidently was so startled by what he saw that he remained in his awkward position until Tom was by his side.

"What made you run away from me, Abe? I never wanted to see you so much in my life. Where are you going? Where's Little Peter? Where's Sarah? How did Benzeor's house burn up? Where are they all now?" said Tom.

Disregarding the rapid and somewhat disjointed questions, Abe, still in his awkward position on the ground, looked up into Tom's face and said, "Is dat you sho'ly, Marsa Tom? Is you come for Abe?"

"Yes, that's who it is, in flesh and blood too," said Tom, as he grasped the trembling negro by the shoulder and assisted him to stand. "Who did you think it was? A ghost?"

"Sho!" said the frightened Abe. "Don' talk dat way," and he glanced fearfully about him as if he expected some evil presence to reveal itself there and then.

"Tell me, Abe," said Tom quickly, in no mood for sharing the slave's abject terror, "where the folks are. Where's Peter and Sarah and all the rest?"

"Abe tink you dead. He did for sho'. Whar you come from, Marsa Tom?"

"I'm here, that's all I've time to say now. Now speak up, Abe, and tell me what the meaning of all this is. Who burned these buildings?"

"Don' know, Marsa Tom. Don' for a fac'."

"Don't know? Don't know? Well, you know where Peter is. Now tell me."

"Don' know," persisted Abe. "Ain' seen Petah in good many mo'."

"Hav n't seen him in a good many months? What do you mean? He is n't dead, is he? Come, Abe, speak up and tell me before I have to help you talk."

"Don' know, Marsa Tom. Don' know nothin' 'bout it. 'Spec' Petah am dead, same as yo'," and again Abe peered timidly at Tom as if to make sure that his eyes did not deceive him and that it really was "Marsa Tom" before him in the flesh and no other.

"Tell me, Abe," said Tom more sternly, "where are Sarah and her mother?"

"Don' know. 'Spec' dey am at Little Petah's house; nebbah know, though. Mebbe pine-robbers come an' gobble 'em up. Nebbah can tell, for sho'."

"We'll go over there and see anyway,"

said Tom at last, almost hopeless of being able to extract any information from Abe. "Come on."

Together the two started across the lots in the direction of Little Peter's house, and as they walked on, by dint of many questions, Tom managed to learn something of the events which had occurred during his long absence.

It seemed that Benzeor's place had been confiscated by the angry patriots of Old Monmouth, though out of sympathy for the traitor's wife and children, whose loyalty none suspected, and because of the presence of Little Peter's young brothers and sisters there, permission was given them all to remain until such a time as the war should be ended, if that time ever came, which some were very much inclined to doubt.

Somehow word of the confiscation had been received by Benzeor, and in his rage he had returned with a party of companions one night, resolved to take away with him such possessions as could be carried and also to remove his family to other quarters. Both Sarah and her mother, who had been made aware of the part Benzeor had taken in the attack on Peter Van Mater's home, had

refused to go and abandon the little children of their neighbor, who were now entirely dependent upon their care, and to whom the two women felt under special obligations.

Benzeor's rage at their refusal to depart was even greater than that over the confiscation of his place, and he had ordered his companions to load everything of value upon the wagon they had brought. Among other things he had bidden Abe to take the hams which were stored in the cellar and place them also in the wagon.

With many a chuckle of delight Abe related to Tom how he had thrown the hams up through the cellar window upon the ground and then proceeded to throw them into the wagon. This wagon had been placed near the house and close to some bushes which bordered the garden, and when the men had not been watching him he had added a little extra force to his arm and somehow some of the hams had been thrown clear over the wagon and lodged in the bushes on the farther side. There they had afterwards been discovered and restored by the faithful black man.

Another visit had later been made by Benzeor, and utterly unmindful of the wants of

his family he had ordered them all to depart from the place and had then set fire to the buildings, resolved, as he expressed it, that if he could n't have his own then no one else should have it. His wife and children, along with Little Peter's brothers and sisters, had then sought shelter in the abandoned home of the Van Maters, and nothing more had since been heard of Benzeor and his companions.

As to Little Peter himself, all that Tom could learn was that some months before this time, when he had left the militia for a few weeks to do the necessary summer work on the farm, word from his father had come one morning and the lad had departed at once upon the summons. Not a word had been heard from him since that day, and whether he was dead or alive no one knew.

For a time Tom walked on in silence. The information he had received was sad enough to occupy all his thoughts, and he was waiting until he should see Sarah, from whom he had no doubt he could learn the particulars which Abe was either too stupid or too much frightened to give him.

"What have you been doing since Colonel Tye's death?" he said at last. "I thought

he was going to set every slave in Old Monmouth free."

"Tye dead," said Abe solemnly. "No one he'p black man now. Abe stick to de fam'ly. Don' hab nuthin' ter do with red-coats. Stick ter de family, dat what Abe do. Dere Mis' Sarah now!" he added abruptly.

Looking up, Tom discovered Sarah at work in a field near Little Peter's house. She was hoeing, and so intent upon her labors that she had not as yet become aware of the approach of Tom and his companion.

As Tom ran eagerly forward she soon discovered him, and at first too startled to speak had watched him as if the sight were almost too good to be true.

"Oh Tom, I am so glad to see you!" she said as he approached, dropping her hoe and holding forth both her hands to greet him. "Where did you come from? Where have you been? We thought you were dead. Oh, it has been such a terrible time in Old Monmouth since you've been away. How changed you are!"

"I'm afraid you are not without change, too," said Tom gently. "How long has it been since the girls and women have had to do the hoeing and planting?"

“A long time now, Tom; but that’s a very small matter. It’s this constant fear of a midnight attack that’s the worst. You don’t know how much we have had to suffer. There’s hardly a man left in the county now to do the work. The women have it all to do, but we don’t mind that so much as we do the fear of having everything taken away from us. It’s fearful, Tom, when there are so many to feed, and you don’t know but any day every mouthful of corn and every potato you’ve worked so hard to raise may be taken from you. Tell me about Little Peter. Has he been with you?”

“No. All I know about him is what Abe here has told me.”

“He went away one morning saying he’d just had word from his father. You know he was a prisoner in New York, don’t you? Well, that was almost a year ago, and we have n’t heard a word from him since.”

For a long time Tom and Sarah stood and talked together of the sad experiences which had come to each of them since they had last met. The fire, the plundering of the region by the redcoats and pine-robbers, the constantly increasing terror in the county, Tom’s experiences in Refugee Town, all these and

many things beside were gone over, and at last when they started towards the little house Tom said, —

“It’s too bad to leave you here all alone, Sarah. You have n’t any one to help you do even the garden work.”

“I don’t want any one,” said the girl stoutly. “Other women do it, and why should n’t I? I’m no better than they are, and besides I have the children to help me. They’ve grown so you’d hardly know them, and are a real help to me, I can assure you. No, Tom, I would n’t have you stay here for the world. Every man must do his part in the army now, and if the women have to help, too, before the war’s over, I’ll do my share, you know. I would n’t have you give it up now for anything. I’m proud of you, Tom, and if you are willing I should like to have you tell me what you are planning to do next.”

So Tom told her of Captain Adam Hyler’s invitation to join his forces, and how he was planning to build a fleet of whale-boats with which they were to attack the gunboats of the British when they came down from New York, and also to enter upon some expeditions of their own.

“That’s dangerous work, Tom,” said Sarah soberly, “but I would n’t keep you back from it. You’re a man now, and will never be a coward, I know.”

“Except by name,” said Tom, flushing as he spoke at the recollection of a certain interview he had had with Sarah just before he had first left home.

“That’s not kind of you,” said Sarah sadly. “That was long ago, and you ought not to bring that up to me now. You know how I grieved over my wicked words.”

“So you did, Sarah,” said Tom quickly, “and I *was* a coward to speak of it. I’ll remember these words you’ve just spoken and forget the others. Here we are at the house.”

For two days Tom remained with the family, doing all in his power for their comfort and welfare, and then after a farewell started forth to join Captain Hyler’s band in what proved to be the most exciting and dangerous part of all the terrible struggle in Old Monmouth.

CHAPTER XXV

CAPTAIN HYLER'S DARING

CAPTAIN HYLER had departed from the place where Tom had last seen him, but as it was well known that he had only gone on to Brunswick, the lad lost no time in following. At various places along the banks of the Raritan where the little streams joined the river, he found some of the captain's men, though not a whale-boat was to be seen. These were either concealed among the bushes, or in such an unfinished condition that they had not yet been launched.

By these men, who were for the time serving as much as guards and watchmen as active members of the daring captain's band, Tom was directed to go farther up the river, and doubtless at Brunswick town he would find the bold leader himself. And there at night-fall Tom found him in the midst of a band of men working upon an unfinished whale-boat near the bank of the river, and at once reported to him.

"Come back, have ye?" said Captain Hyler in his deepest voice.

"Yes. I told you I'd come."

"Tellin' and comin' is two different things. However, I'm pleased to see you, lad. Now you'll find lodgings and victuals in that little house," and the captain pointed to a small hut near by as he spoke. "To-morrow morning we'll find something for you to do, and will try to keep you out of mischief. How's your courage, lad? Got any left?"

"I think so, though I'm tired now. I've rowed all the way up the river in a skiff I found near the bay, and which I took without leave."

"'T won't be the only thing ye'll take before we've done, that is, if we find you're equal to the occasion."

Tom left the captain and moved about among the men, curiously observing them at their work. Two unfinished whale-boats were there upon which they were busily working, and two more which evidently had been already used.

After supper that night the two boats which were complete were manned, and Tom himself was bidden to take an oar and join the crew of one. Not knowing what was ex-

pected of him, he readily consented, and soon was pulling a lusty stroke as the long, light boat was driven out upon the river.

It was not long before he discovered that it was a practice spin upon which they were engaged. One of the boats would be held in its place on the river, while its crew rested upon their oars, and then the other would be rowed swiftly towards it. The surprising part of the task was that not only speed was sought, but silence. With long and powerful strokes the boat would be driven forward, and as it came near the other, the men who were resting on their oars would cry out as soon as they could hear the sound of the oars in the approaching boat. Then the course would be changed, the boat would go up the stream and again approach her companion, the men all striving to row swiftly and at the same time to approach nearer than before without being heard.

After an hour had passed, the other boat took its turn, the men who manned it going through manœuvres similar to those which the first crew had practiced. Tom had always prided himself upon his ability as an oarsman, and he was not a little chagrined when he was sharply reprimanded by his compan-

ions for his awkwardness and lack of skill. And indeed the marvelous power of the men in the boat with him was somewhat discouraging to the recruit, but he did his best and soon was pleased to see that his efforts were more successful. It was simply wonderful to him, the combined swiftness and silence with which the men forced the boats ahead.

After the sun disappeared from sight they returned to the shore, and soon after sought their rude beds in the hut, a guard having first been stationed for the night. Weary as Tom was, it was long before he fell asleep. The new experience was so exciting and the scenes so novel, that he was going over them again and again long after the sounds which were heard in the hut indicated that his companions had not been troubled by any such thoughts as were running through his mind. What a marvelous band it was! Altogether Captain Hyler, at the various places along the banks, must have more than a hundred men. And they were choice men, too. Strong and determined, they would be sure to accomplish something before the summer was ended, he thought, and it was an honor to have been admitted to their ranks. He would do his very best, he resolved, and forming the resolution

forgot that and all else as his eyes closed and he fell asleep.

Early on the following morning the men were stirring, and after a hearty breakfast, prepared by negro cooks, they resumed their labors upon the unfinished whale-boats, and Tom was bidden to join them in their tasks. At the close of the day the practice upon the river was resumed, and for two hours the men rowed as desperately as they might have done, had a British gunboat been the object for which they were struggling.

Indeed, as the days passed, Tom discovered that this was the routine of their lives. After the two boats had been completed, they were sent down the river and other boats were at once begun. These labors were in no wise permitted to interfere with the time spent in practice on the river, and as the slow weeks passed, the skill developed by the men became more and more marked, a source of as much satisfaction to the gruff-voiced captain, who came to them almost every day, as to the men themselves.

Still there had been no call for action. Rumors of the evil deeds of the marauding bands of outlaws and foraging parties from New York were plentiful, but Captain Hyler

had given slight heed to them. He drilled his men regularly, carefully observing the work of each man and saying nothing as to what his own plans for the future were to be.

The summer was now gone, and the falling leaves once more indicated that autumn was nigh. The life in the little camp was becoming monotonous. Building whale-boats and taking practice spins upon the Raritan were not what the men had entered the service for, and the complaints and mutterings were daily becoming more pronounced. Still the rugged captain apparently was oblivious of the restlessness of the men, and spoke not a word of the time when all this inactivity would be over and the real service, for which the men were longing, would begin. Indeed, he appeared to be more strenuous than before, and insisted upon increasing the hours of practice, meanwhile watching each man still more carefully, if such a thing were possible, and coming to know the strong and the weak points of them all.

The change for which the men were longing came one night early in October. Captain Hyler had been in the camp all day, and near sunset a man came with whom he held a long and secret conference. When that was

ended, the captain selected several of his followers, and withdrawing with them to a secluded spot in the camp talked to them long and earnestly. It was evident to all that something unusual was on foot, but what it was no one could conjecture.

Nor was the curiosity relieved when darkness came, and with audible grumblings the men sought their rude bunks for the night. Tom Coward was as curious as any of his mates, but as he was one of the youngest he had not given voice to his feelings, and was soon asleep.

The sun had not appeared when the lad was roused by the touch of a hand upon his shoulder. As he opened his eyes he beheld Ben Kittel, the man next in authority to Captain Adam Hyler himself, standing before him.

"Come, Tom, I want you," whispered Ben. "Don't make any noise, for I don't want to disturb the others."

Tom hastily dressed himself, meanwhile anxiously watching Ben, who moved about among the sleeping men, rousing one after another by his silent touch. Only a part of the band in the hut were selected, and when at last they all went out into the open

air Tom saw that about thirty-five men were there, and it was at once evident that something very unusual was about to occur.

Breakfast already had been prepared, and as the men ate, still not a word was spoken to explain the meaning of the early morning assembly. It was not until breakfast had been eaten and the men had all gone down to the bank of the river that they learned what was expected of them.

Captain Hyler himself was there, and as soon as he had assembled the band about him, he raised his hand in token of silence, though no one had yet spoken, and in his low, deep tones said, —

“We ’ve business on hand this morning, men, serious business, too. We ’ll have to take our lives in our hands. Now if there ’s one of you that does n’t feel like going on, let him speak right up now and say so. He need n’t be ashamed to do it, either. Some of you have wives and babies, and maybe you don’t want to start down the river, not knowing whether you ’ll ever come back alive or not. If there ’s any one of you that wants to step out and quit, let him say so like a man, and say it now.”

Captain Hyler paused a moment, but no

one replied. It was plain that the men realized the serious nature of the unknown venture they were about to make, but not one was ready or willing to withdraw.

"That's what I expected of you, men," said the captain gravely, "but I did n't want any one to think Adam Hyler had taken him along without giving him fair warning. But every man must be ready to obey orders on the spot and not stop to ask questions. Now then, if you're all ready we'll start."

Two of the longest and swiftest of the whale-boats were ready for them, and close beside was a gunboat. Into the last Captain Hyler himself entered after the men selected for its crew had taken their places, and then the two whale-boats were manned. In one of these Tom Coward found himself, with Ben Kittel in command of the dozen stalwart men who made up its crew.

Tom was excited and could see that others were as much stirred as he; but the calm manner in which the leaders went about their tasks, with the quiet bearing of the men who already had had some experience in similar expeditions, was wonderfully inspiring. Apparently no one but the men in command knew just what was to be attempted, though

all were satisfied that it was to be something which would test their best efforts.

"Are you all ready?" inquired Captain Hyler, standing erect in the stern of the gun-boat. "Give way, then."

The men promptly responded, and the three boats began to move swiftly down the river. The outgoing tide favored them and their progress was rapid, so no one was required to exert himself overmuch. Mile after mile the boats moved down the stream, and soon had gained the waters of the bay. Not a vessel had yet been sighted, and the mystery of the purpose of the expedition was as deep as ever.

Across the bay the three boats kept on their way, and soon rounded the point at Sandy Hook. Instantly the men glanced before them, as if here they expected to learn the work which was expected of them. Nor were they mistaken. Not far distant was the guard-ship, which the British kept anchored off the shore, though its purpose was more that of warning than of service to the men of Refugee Town. But about a quarter of a mile beyond the guard-ship five small vessels could be seen riding at anchor, and every one knew at once that with them they would find the assigned task of the morning.

If any doubt had remained, it would have disappeared when Captain Hyler called to his companions, "That's what we've got to do this morning, men. We must take every one o' them five sloops. Now give way with a will."

Instantly the speed of the whale-boats was increased. The men bent to their tasks and with long strokes sent the swift little crafts forward. So low did they lie upon the water that an ordinary observer upon the shore would hardly have discovered them. On and on sped the whale-boats, and nearer and nearer they came to the sloops. Soon it was discovered that two of these were armed, one mounting four six-pounders and one six swivels. Still not a sign of hesitation appeared in the crews of the whale-boats. The men were rowing desperately now, and with set jaws and straining muscles seemed to be constantly increasing their speed. The light crafts rose on the crests of the waves together, and together rode the swells. The sea was unusually calm that morning, and apparently all things favored them.

Not yet had their coming been perceived by the men on board the sloop. It was still early in the morning, and, under the fancied

protection of the guard-ship, doubtless not a thought of danger had entered their minds; and all the time, creeping stealthily and steadily nearer, came the whale-boats and their crews.

At last, when only about a hundred yards lay between them and the sloops, the three boats separated, and with a final burst of speed started toward the two armed sloops, resolved to take these first if possible. In a few minutes they were alongside, and before the startled crews were fairly aware of what was occurring, the desperate men were clambering up the sides and over the rail, and some even had gained a foothold on the deck.

Then with a shout the crew started for their guns, but it was too late. Hand to hand the men forced their way upon the deck, the mighty captain himself leading all. To the startled sailors it seemed as if the very ocean itself was covered with whale-boats. For a moment they attempted to resist, and then made a rush for one of the long boats. Leaping into this, they cut it loose, and with as much haste, if not with as great skill as the attacking party had displayed in their approach, they began to pull for the shore.

Meanwhile the other armed sloop had met a similar fate, the crew being as startled by the unexpected approach of the whale-boats as their companions had been. The men on the other three sloops had now taken warning and, leaping into their long boats, were also rowing swiftly for the shore. Not a gun had been fired by Captain Hyler's men, and all five of the sloops were in their possession.

At once the men began to examine their prizes. To take them off was hopeless, but the cargoes were valuable, and with eager haste they began to select from these the best and to load their whale-boats. The sails were stripped from the masts, the swivels were lowered, and every man was doing his utmost to gain time.

Meanwhile the crews of the sloops had landed and from the little fort on the shore were firing at Captain Hyler's men, though fortunately thus far without inflicting any damage. The guard-ship was also striving to get under way, and it was evident to the attacking party that longer delay would be perilous.

"Set fire to the crafts and then leave!" shouted the captain.

The men instantly responded, and a mo-

ment later flames could be seen on the decks of the two armed sloops. Then the whale-boats were headed for the three remaining sloops, and the men, making their way upon deck, speedily followed the example set by their companions.

Four of the sloops were now burning, and only one remained. To that Ben Kittel's whale-boat turned, and in a moment the men were on deck, Tom Coward among them. They ran to start a fire in the hold, when they suddenly stopped as they beheld a woman, and three little children weeping and clinging to her skirts. Tom's surprise was greater than that of the others when he recognized the woman as the wife of Benzeor Osburn and the three children as her own.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

STARTLED as Tom was by the unexpected sight, there was no opportunity for questions or explanations. As soon as it was discovered that the women and children were the only ones on board the sloop, the order was given to depart at once, and not set fire to the vessel.

Accordingly, the men quickly resumed their places in the whale-boat, and, taking up their oars, began to row towards their companions, who had already started from the scene. The flames on the four burning vessels were now mounting higher and higher, and the roar could be heard far away. They darted up the tall masts; they climbed out along the bowsprits and burst in long tongues of fire from the hold. The fire was indescribably wild and grand, and not the least impressive part was that of the terror-stricken faces of Benzeor Osburn's wife and children, who were huddled together near the rail, and gazing

with terrified eyes at the flames all about them. They were safe from all danger of the fire, but they were alone, and the departure of the whale-boats increased their fright in the added fear now that they were to be left to their fate.

A strong breeze had sprung up and blew directly upon the backs of the rowers. Difficult as it made their labors, pulling as they were against both wind and tide, it still proved to be greatly in their favor. The guard-ship had hoisted her sails by this time and was ready for the pursuit of the desperate men who had dared to run in so close, and almost under her very guns set fire to the sloops which had so confidently rested under her protection. The wind, however, was dead against her, and she could make but little progress compared with that of the whale-boats, which were driven steadily forward under the long and powerful strokes of their crews. Tom Coward watched the white faces of the abandoned people on the deck of the sloop as long as they could be seen, and then gave all his thought to the task at hand.

Along the shore, armed men could be seen running in a course parallel to that of the boats, and any thought of landing was therefore

impossible, even if Captain Hyler's men had had any such inclination. On and on swept the whale-boats, the rowers not pausing even for breath. The long hours of practice now showed their effects, and soon Refugee Town, the guard-ship, and the men on the shore, could no longer be seen. Still the daring captain held to his course, and even when the low point of Sandy Hook had been gained he gave no orders for the men to rest on their oars or to change their course. Straight ahead the boats held to their way, and not long afterwards the shores of Staten Island loomed up before them.

Towards these the captain directed his course, and soon after the men landed and drew the boats up on the shore. Then guards were stationed and the others were permitted to rest. Tom suspected that they had not turned into the bay for fear that some boats inside the Hook might be lying in wait for them, a conjecture which he afterwards learned was correct.

After sunset, however, the men once more took their places in the boats and prepared to cross the bay and go up the river. Pains were taken to row silently, and like creeping shadows, and almost as noiseless, the three

boats safely entered the waters of the Raritan, and then had no fears of a further pursuit. Their labors had been increased by the stores they had secured on the luckless sloops; but now that all immediate danger was past, the exultation of the men became more marked, and the delight at the success which had crowned their efforts at once found expression.

To Tom's surprise Ben Kittel ordered his men to land when they had gone up the river about three miles. No one offered any protest as they saw their companions proceed on their way without them, and obediently they hauled the light whale-boat up into the bushes, where it was effectually concealed from the sight of any who might pass the point on the river.

As soon as a hasty supper had been eaten, the men sought the hut there, which was not unlike that in which Tom had been sleeping for the past few weeks, and like that built and concealed among the trees which grew near the shore. Worn by their exertions of the day, but a few minutes elapsed before every one was asleep, and not a sound to disturb them was heard until they were summoned to breakfast on the following morning.

After Tom had bathed his face in the waters of a running brook near by, he turned to join his companions, who were seated on the ground in a semicircle about the fire, where their breakfast had been prepared. He was thoroughly rested now, and the success of the preceding day and the keen air of the October morning together combined to make him ready for the breakfast which was awaiting him.

There was something stirring also in the sight of the men who were his companions. What a sturdy lot they were! Small wonder was it that Captain Hyler was proud of his followers, for every one looked to be, what the doughty leader declared he was, a picked man. Beyond the leafless trees he could see the shining waters of the Raritan glimmering like silver in the early sunlight. It seemed almost impossible to link the scene with the horrors of war. It was more like a picnic or a camping party.

The sight of the guns — for every man had placed his own within easy reach, not being willing to take even his breakfast without the presence of his protecting weapon — served to recall any wandering thoughts to the exact condition which confronted them all; and as

Tom approached the group he realized once more the dire straits which had compelled these men to leave their homes and unite for the defense of Old Monmouth.

"Come, lad, come! Bestir yourself, if you want any breakfast," called one of the men good-naturedly. "You did so well yesterday that you ought not to be left out in a time like this."

"I'm with you now," laughed Tom, as he advanced to the fire, and taking a wooden bowl filled it with the hasty pudding on which the men were breakfasting, and then seated himself upon the ground.

He perceived that the place was one of the numerous camps which Captain Hyler's men had along the shore, and that at least a score of men were there who had had no part in the adventure of the preceding day. They were no less interested in it than were the men who had gone and, to show their good-will, were taking upon themselves the duties of hosts. They had prepared the breakfast, and were now attending to the wants of the heroes who had joined them.

The talk was chiefly of the venture, and many were the expressions of pleasure heard on all sides at its successful issue.

"'T was a big risk," said one man soberly. "But all 's well that ends well."

"Pshaw! 'T was no risk at all," said one who was hardly more than a lad. "For my part I wish we were to start on another this morning."

"Hear the young cock crow," replied the first speaker. "Don't spread your tail feathers too wide or you'll have some of them plucked."

"Stop your blarney, Jack," said another of the older men. "The young fry have done their part, you can't deny that."

"I don't want to deny it. I'm as proud of the boys of Old Monmouth as ever you are. Here's one that did his part like a major," he added, as he turned and placed his hand roughly upon Tom's shoulder.

Tom's face flushed with pleasure. He had done his best, he well knew that, and the appreciation of his efforts by his companions was doubly grateful. To cover his confusion, he rose to go to the fire again and replenish his bowl, when he suddenly stopped and stared in surprise at one of the men who belonged to the camp, and who was busily engaged in attending to the wants of the men. The man, too, had stopped, and was gazing at

Tom with an expression of astonishment as great as that upon the lad's own face.

He was the first to speak, and hastily placing the bowl in his hands upon the ground, he made a rush for Tom, and, grasping him by the shoulders, turned him about, peered eagerly into his face, and then shouted, —

“Bedad! An’ it’s Tommie! Faith and the sight o’ yez makes me tongue water and me eyes clave to the roof o’ me mouth!”

“Mike, where’d you come from? I did n’t know you were here. It’s really you, is n’t it?”

“Me, is it? Jest feel o’ me arm and see fer yersilf. Ah! this is the lad what took Billy Giberson up in his arms like a babby and jist planked him down in the jail, he did that,” added the delighted Michael, turning to the men as he spoke. “It’s that proud o’ him Oi am that Oi’d loike to be after givin’ him a love pat wid me own shillalah. He’s a beautiful bye, he is, and it’s mesilf as will be after tellin’ yez all about how he cracked the shins o’ that same Billy Giberson. Yez see” —

“Hush, Mike!” said Tom quickly, as the men began to laugh at the words. “Come over here and sit down with me and tell me

where you've been and what you've been doing since I saw you."

Michael eagerly responded, and for a long time after the others had left the fire the two sat and talked of their experiences. But Tom could learn little from Michael that he did not already know. Of the disappearance of Little Peter, the Irishman only knew the current report that word had come to him from his father in the prison in New York, and that the lad had departed from Old Monmouth in response to the news; but months had passed since he had been heard from.

"It's me own opinion," said Michael soberly, "that he met Billy Giberson's sister somewhere, and that she hit him a clip wid her shillalah for the sake ov her brother. She'll niver forgive yez for crackin' his bones, me lad."

Of Michael's own story there was not much to tell. He had remained in the militia until about three months before this time, and then, in response to the call of Captain Adam Hyler for men, had offered himself, and had been accepted. "But it's no such luck as has come to mesilf that yez had yisterday," he added sadly. "But cheer up, me bye, we'll soon be dead! It's only one chance at the

murderin' spalpeens Oi'm wantin'. Do yez think yez can be after gettin' me a place in the next trip?"

"I don't have anything to do with that, Mike," replied Tom. "Now tell me, can you explain how it was that I saw Benzeor Osburn's wife and children on board of one of those sloops off the Hook yesterday?"

Michael gazed for a moment in astonishment at Tom as if he did not fully comprehend what he had said. His confidence was quickly restored, however, and, shaking his head wisely, he said, "Of course I can explain it, me bye. Nothin's more easy than that. Now thin, yez see, that same Benzeor is a traitor, bad luck to the loikes o' him. Now, seein' as how he's a traitor, he can't be any friend ov Old Mônmouth. Whiniver a man's a traitor, don't yez be after puttin' a bit o' trust in him. If he was only loike Billy Giberson an' could be after givin' yez a chance wid yer shillalah, or even if he was a bit loike that same Bill Giberson's sister what can jump sthaight over a load o' hay an' niver touch one ov her toes to the ground, why thin, there'd be some use in dalin' wid him; but yez see" —

"Go right on, Mike. I'll be back in the

course of two or three hours," said Tom, rising and starting to join his companions, satisfied that he had heard all that Michael could tell.

"Hold on, me bye!" shouted Michael, leaping to his feet and running to overtake Tom. "As Oi was jist tellin' yez, that same Benzeor was a traitor" —

But Tom had disappeared among the trees, and the disconsolate Irishman returned to his labors by the fire.

The men were soon found, and Tom learned that their immediate duties were to consist in practicing several hours each morning and afternoon in the long whale-boats. Up and down the river they rowed, sometimes at full speed, and again moving slowly, but at all times to obtain the two requisites of speed and silence; and it was marvelous the results they gained.

Almost as noiseless as a floating leaf they moved over the water, and yet at a speed which fairly rivaled the wings of the wind; and the men took such pride in their efforts and labored so faithfully that their progress became more and more marked with every passing day.

Not many days had passed, however, before

they were again summoned for the more serious tasks. One morning, only six days after their former adventure, Captain Hyler, with a gunboat and one whale-boat, appeared, and ordered one of the whale-boats there to be manned and follow him at once.

Tom was again selected as a member of the crew, and to Michael's inexpressible delight he, too, was permitted to join, the one condition placed upon him being that he should not speak a word except in reply to questions from Ben Kittel, who was in command of the boat.

Michael promised faithfully, and when he found himself seated next to Tom, his face beamed with pleasure, and in a loud whisper he said, " Oi have n't said one word since we started, me bye. It's silent Oi can be wid de best o' 'em, when Oi try."

" Silence there in the bow," called Ben Kittel sharply.

" Oi was jist after explainin' that Oi had not spoken a word," spoke up Michael. " It's as still Oi can be as best o' yez."

" If I hear another word from you I'll land you, or if I can't do that I'll throw you overboard, you wild Irishman!" exclaimed Ben, now thoroughly angry.

The abashed Michael subsided, and the whale-boat sped forward. Down the river and across the bay the three boats again made their way, and as they came near the light-house fort at Sandy Hook they could all see two schooners and a sloop riding at anchor there in a false sense of security under the protection of the guns on shore.

“There’s our game, men,” said Ben. “That’s what we came for. Now every man must obey orders and do his best. We’ve big work cut out for us this day. Give way!”

With a will the men responded, and swiftly the three boats drew nearer and nearer the little fleet.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE PURSUIT

EXCITED as the men were, not a word was spoken, nor did any one display a sign of fear, no matter how much alarmed he may have felt. A few days previous to this time Captain Hyler had ordered his boat to the land, and had put ashore, without any ceremony or word of explanation, one of his crew who had betrayed his fear. There was no place among the forces of Captain Hyler for one who was not as bold and determined as the leader himself, and all understood that clearly now. The prize money, the protection of Old Monmouth, and the interference with the many boats of the British, which at this time of the year were frequently sent from New York down the Jersey shore, to secure supplies for the rapidly approaching winter, were considered as sufficient motives to make every man do his full duty, and Captain Hyler had no place for those who might be of a different mind from himself.

It quickly became evident, as the three whale-boats sped forward, that whatever the lack of information as to their immediate plans might be among the men, the leaders fully understood their tasks, and the part each was to take in the coming engagement. The three boats soon separated, and each bore down upon one of the three vessels before them. Not a man as yet had appeared on the deck of any of the boats, and the whale-boats were now only a hundred yards away.

"Give way, men! Hit her up!" called Ben Kittel in a low voice, leaning eagerly forward and carefully watching the deck of the sloop for which they were headed.

Instantly the men increased their already swift strokes; his whale-boat darted forward as a horse responds to the touch of a whip, and in a very few seconds ran in alongside the sloop. The oars were as quickly shipped when Ben grasped the rail with his long boat-hook, and, following one another, swiftly the men clambered up on the deck.

No one was there to meet them, and it was at once evident that the crew had gone ashore, doubtless feeling sure that no harm could come to their vessel, anchored as it was close under the guns of the lighthouse fort.

“Faith, the beggars have run away!” exclaimed the delighted Michael to Tom. “They did n’t even wait to give us the top o’ the mornin’.”

“Hush, Mike!” said Tom quickly; “you must n’t speak.”

“Spake, is it? Oi have n’t said one word.” —

But a sharp look from Ben Kittel silenced the loquacious Irishman, and he turned with the others to follow their leader’s gaze, who was striving to discover what was occurring on board the other vessels.

On one of the schooners also not a soul had appeared, but on the other two men were seen. It was Captain Hyler’s own crew which had boarded that vessel, and the two men were quickly thrown into the hold and the hatches barred; then the captain turned and called to his men on the sloop and the other schooner, and gave the command to get under way at once.

Tom and Michael, with a part of their crew, began to haul in the anchor, while others were hoisting the sails. The men all labored hard, and no one spoke. On all three boats the white sails began to rise, and the favoring breeze at once filled them. Before the

anchors had been fairly dragged on deck the vessels were beginning to move through the waters with the long whale-boats in tow; and the eager faces of the men betrayed their elation at the success which had crowned their efforts without a gun having been fired or a man injured.

Just then, however, a puff of smoke arose from the fort, the boom of the cannon was heard, and a ball came skipping over the water uncomfortably close to the sloop, on board of which were Tom and Michael. Nor was that all. The guard-ship was hoisting its sails, and it was evident that they were not to be permitted to escape without a pursuit, and possibly a hand-to-hand engagement.

The guard-ship was soon under way, and it required but a few minutes to discover that she was a much swifter craft than the sloop. The two schooners were doing nobly, and already were beginning to leave the sloop and the pursuing guard-ship behind them. The sloop was clumsy and heavy, and she tore through the water with about as much grace and speed as a tub might have displayed under similar circumstances. She was not even equipped with a cannon; and as the ship came plunging forward in swift pursuit

it was soon evident that she was not intending to fire, plainly feeling confident that she would soon overtake the craft before her.

Ben Kittel had not once spoken after he had given the orders to get under way. He stood by the stern watching the ship, an occupation in which his companions also shared. The distance between the two vessels was steadily decreasing. Nothing that the men could do seemed to be able to increase her speed. Still Ben watched the swift pursuer and only turned his eyes occasionally to see how it fared with the escaping schooners. One of these was now far in advance, and the other was at almost half the distance between the sloop and his companions.

Tom was becoming more and more excited. Capture was certain if something was not done soon. He wondered at the calmness of Ben Kittel. Could he not see that the ship would soon overhaul them? Why did he not act? Anything was better than to fall into the hands of the angry men on the other vessel. He could not take his eyes from the ship. Evidently she was well manned, and apparently her deck was covered with sailors, who were clearly to be seen watching the unfortunate sloop before them.

Suddenly Ben turned and said sharply, "It's no use; we can't get her away. They sha'n't have her, though. Set her afire, and then make for the whale-boat. We'll show 'em a trick or two yet."

Instantly the men responded. Some sprang into the hold, while others swiftly made their way into the cabin. Only a moment or two elapsed before a thin line of smoke could be seen issuing from each place, and the men rushed on deck again and leaped into the whale-boat.

"Give way now, men! Make for the schooner ahead! Pull! Pull! Pull as you never have pulled in your lives!"

No second word was needed. The men bent to their task, and with powerful strokes sent the light craft forward. Soon the sloop was left behind, and they could see that their companions on the schooner had discovered what was going on behind them.

The whale-boat was not to escape so easily, however. The forward gun of the guardship was trained upon them, the report rang out, and only a few yards away the heavy shot struck the water.

"Bedad, and Oi moight have caught that wid me two hands," muttered Michael; but

no one heeded his words, not even Ben Kittel himself. They were all eager to gain the deck of the schooner and escape from the oncoming guard-ship.

Meanwhile the flames in the sloop had forced their way from the cabin and the hold. Clouds of smoke rolled up and were swept away by the wind. The flames could be seen darting up the mast, and had it not been for the deep breathing of the men doubtless they would have heard the crackling and roaring of the fire. It was a sublime sight, and yet not one that offered much comfort to the daring crew of the whale-boat.

The guard-ship had not given up the pursuit, but, abandoning the sloop, held steadily on its way after the schooner, which was lying to and waiting for the coming of the whale-boat. Every moment was precious now, and the exertions of the men redoubled. The perspiration rolled down their faces in streams and their breath came in gasps. Their safety, perhaps even their lives, depended upon gaining the schooner soon.

Nearer and nearer they came, and then at a word from Ben Kittel they once more endeavored to increase their speed. Just as the schooner came about, the long whale-boat

glided alongside, eager hands were stretched forth by the men leaning low over the rail, and in a moment all had leaped on board, and the whale-boat was taken in tow.

Then the panting crew turned to see how it fared with their pursuers. Not more than half a mile away was the guard-ship, bending low under the freshening breeze. The schooner, though a better sailor than the sloop, was still far from being swift, but the men were doing their utmost to increase her speed. Fortunately she was not heavily loaded, and there was nothing to hold her back. Both vessels were doing nobly, but only a few minutes had passed before it became evident that the guard-ship was gaining.

Ben Kittel had assumed command of the schooner as soon as he and his men had come on board. The long low point of the Hook had now been gained. Captain Hyler had already turned into the bay, and his schooner could be seen about as far in advance as the ship was behind. The channel was at some distance from the point, and the men were eagerly watching and waiting until that should be gained and they, too, could turn into the bay. The ship might then pursue for a time, but she would not dare venture

far up the river, lined as it was in places by the hardy supporters of Captain Hyler. As if by common consent, the Raritan was considered as the rallying place of the patriots, as Sandy Hook and Refugee Town were of the Tories and refugees.

Three times the guard-ship had fired at them, and one ball had torn a great rent in the mainsail. The problem of their escape would be solved if they could only gain the channel soon, and then turn into the bay. Their pursuers were gaining steadily, there was no disguising that fact. The men on the deck of the schooner were watching their every movement, never taking their eyes from the ship save occasionally to glance ahead at the place where the channel was. It was near now, and yet how far away it seemed. Would they ever succeed in gaining it? Surely the prospect was not promising, and the uneasiness among the crew became more and more evident.

Suddenly Ben Kittel changed the course of the schooner and started straight across the bay without waiting to arrive at the channel. A low exclamation of surprise escaped his men as they saw their leader's action, and some of them shook their heads in protest.

“He’ll never do it,” said one man who was standing near Tom. “He couldn’t make it in high tide, and the tide’s half out now and going out all the time. It’s a foolish risk.”

Tom made no reply, though he, too, feared for the result of Ben’s action. No time was given him for thought, however, for the sharp command of the leader rang out for every man to lay hands on such valuables as he could find and heap them together near the rail.

The crew instantly responded, eager to do anything which would relieve their anxiety even for the time. Busily they labored, and soon a considerable pile had been made on the deck. Each man stopped as he deposited what he had found, and for an instant gazed at their pursuer, who had gone farther out into the bay, and in the channel was running in a course a little behind them and yet almost parallel, and now was not a half mile away. The men shook their heads, but each turned and ran to the cabin or to the hold to seek for other valuables.

Ben had not left his place by the tiller for a moment. Apparently he was cool and unconcerned, and only his closest friends knew of the excitement under which he was laboring.

“Now draw up the whale-boat and load her with what you’ve found,” called Ben. “Be lively, lads! Be lively!”

The whale-boat was drawn alongside, some of the men leaped on board, and others passed down to them the various articles they had collected. They worked desperately and with such haste that the whale-boat was soon loaded. Then Ben ordered both boats to be kept where they were and half the men to take their places on board and be ready with their oars.

Twice had the guard-ship fired at them since they had entered the bay, but fortunately neither shot had taken effect. They were within close range now, and the schooner was compelled to face the double danger of the guns and the shallow waters of the bay. Thus far she had done nobly, and if she could only hold her way for a few minutes longer the pursuers would be compelled to reverse their course and abandon the chase. The faces of the men betrayed their eagerness now as a gleam of hope came that they might after all get away with the schooner. Tom was in the whale-boat, and Michael stood leaning over the rail, glancing alternately at the ship and at Tom, his round face betraying his excite-

ment and his keen enjoyment of the danger.

“Whist, lad!” he called down to Tom in a loud whisper, “we’ve got the spalpeens now. They’ve had their trouble for their” —

Michael did not finish his sentence. The schooner, with a thud which all could hear, struck the bar and was fast aground. The force almost threw every man from his feet, but the unfortunate Michael fared worst of all. He was leaning low over the rail when the shock came, and was pitched head foremost over into the water.

With a yell that might have been heard on board the pursuing ship, Michael disappeared from sight, while his companions at the word of their leader instantly leaped into the whaleboats and prepared at once to abandon the luckless schooner.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE RETURN

BEN KITTEL'S sharp word of command rang out, the men drove their oars deep into the water, and the whale-boat leaped forward as if it, too, was eager to escape from the place. To Tom's consternation not the slightest attention was paid to the call of Michael, who could be seen floundering in the shallow water and striving desperately to make his way to his companions.

"We've left Mike, Ben," called Tom, without relaxing any of his efforts. "He'll drown! Aren't you going to wait for him? 'T won't take a minute. Wait for him! Hold on! Hold on!"

Apparently Ben did not heed the words of the eager lad, and the boat sped swiftly on towards the shore, which was not far distant. To Tom it seemed cruel to abandon the unfortunate Irishman, whom he knew to be unable to swim, and who doubtless would be drowned if no assistance was rendered him;

still he was powerless to do anything for him now, and he was compelled to continue his labors in the boat with the men. He could see Michael struggling in the water, which came almost to his arm-pits, and several times he fell and disappeared from sight.

It was only a brief time before the whale-boat gained the still more shallow waters near the shore, and then at a word from Ben the men all leaped overboard, grasped the sides of the boat, bore it hurriedly up the bank, and concealed it among the bushes.

Then they all turned to see how it fared with the abandoned schooner and the man whom they had left struggling in the water. The latter could no longer be seen, and with a groan Tom thought that doubtless Mike had sunk beneath the waters and was drowned.

No time was given him for such sad conjectures as that, however, for now a yawl had left the guard-ship, and, well manned, was seen to be swiftly approaching the grounded schooner. As it came nearer, Ben Kittel ordered his men to conceal themselves behind the bushes and be prepared to fire when he should give the word, and taking their rifles the men kneeled upon the ground and waited.

To some it seemed as if the approaching

yawl was beyond the range of their guns, but no one spoke as they breathlessly watched the boat coming toward them. The waters of the bay glistened under the rays of the October sun. The curving shore, the rippling waves, the silence, almost oppressive now, which rested over the scene, — all seemed to declare that war and bloodshed did not belong to the day or the place.

In the distance the guard-ship was seen to change her course and move slowly back over the way by which she had come. Captain Hyler's captured schooner had long since disappeared, and now was not only beyond their sight but also beyond the danger of pursuit. The grounded schooner was directly before the watching men, and the approaching yawl was now not many yards distant from her. Michael had not been seen for a long time, and without doubt had ceased to struggle. It seemed almost unreal to Tom Coward, who with his companions was kneeling upon the ground behind the brush, eagerly watching all before him, and with his gun grasped tightly in his hands waiting for the word to fire.

The suspense was becoming almost unbearable. Tom wanted to shout and bid the others

do something ; it didn't matter much what. His throat was parched and dry, and a heavy weight seemed to be resting upon his chest and preventing him from taking a long breath.

Suddenly he was recalled to himself by Ben Kittel, who in a low voice said, " Now, men ! Be careful and don't waste your powder. Aim low and pick out some one man. Are you all ready ? Then give it to them ! Fire ! "

The reports of the guns were almost like that of one, and a cloud of smoke for a moment shut out the sight of the bay before them. As it rolled away they could see that something had occurred on board the yawl. The crew were bending over the forms of two men who had fallen from their seats.

In a moment, however, they hastily grasped their oars again, and, after glancing once towards the shore, took their seats, and with desperate haste began to row back towards the guard-ship.

A cheer rose from the men behind the bushes as they beheld the sudden change, and hastily reloading their rifles they once more fired at the departing yawl. Again there was confusion on board the little boat, but in a moment with increased speed the yawl was sweeping over the waters, and not once did it

stop until it had gained the guard-ship, and the men once more were safe.

Ben Kittel's men watched and waited until the ship had rounded the Hook, and then, at the command of their leader, quickly carried their boat down to the shore again, and, running with it into the water, leaped on board, and began to row back to the abandoned schooner.

Tom was thinking much more of the lost Michael than he was of the vessel for which they were headed, and was scanning the water, partly hoping and yet fearing to see the body of his friend floating out with the tide. He had little sympathy with the elation of his companions, who were rejoicing that they had succeeded in driving away the yawl, and that the guard-ship had abandoned the pursuit, while one at least of the captured vessels had been taken up the Raritan; and consequently they were not inclined to waste much time in bemoaning the fate of the luckless Mike.

To Tom, however, he had been a true friend, and his loss was one which the lad keenly felt. It seemed to him as if everything of late had gone against him. Accused of being the one who had led the way for the men to discover Stephen Edwards in the house

of his father, losing every opportunity he had sought to meet the mythical Colonel Coward, of whose very existence he had become almost skeptical, compelled to serve as a cook for the desperadoes who had assembled at Refugee Town, Little Peter gone, no one seemed to know where, Benzeor's wife and children discovered on board of a sloop off the Hook, and now, last of all, his sole surviving friend, abandoned and doubtless drowned in Raritan bay, all were alike against him.

His heart was hot against Ben Kittel. It would have been such a little thing to stop for a moment and rescue the unfortunate Michael from his predicament. But no: they had brutally left him to his fate, and not one had stretched forth a friendly hand to save him from drowning. Surely human life in Old Monmouth must be cheap, and there was little to encourage a man to do his best, if he could not expect any better treatment than Michael had received.

Gloomy as Tom's thoughts were, he did not relax his efforts, and the swift boat was rapidly approaching the schooner which had been abandoned by the crew. It had almost covered the distance, and Ben Kittel had risen and grasped his boat-hook preparatory

to boarding, when the ears of all were saluted by a call which seemed to come from the water directly beneath them.

“Hould on, will yez? Isn’t it enough for yez to lave me to be drowned entoirely, that yez have to be after runnin’ over me wid yer whale-boat an’ beatin’ a tattoo on me head wid yer oars?”

The whale-boat, which had swiftly passed the spot, was instantly stopped and backed up to the place where the chattering Irishman was now seen standing in the water. Tom was so rejoiced at the unexpected hail that his first impulse was to leap into the water to the assistance of his friend; but one of the sailors, perceiving his intention, placed his hand upon Tom’s shoulder, and the lad restrained himself and waited.

In a moment some of the crew had grasped Michael and drawn him on board; and then, instantly rowing to the schooner, the whale-boat was made fast, and all were soon standing on deck.

Then the wrath of Michael broke forth afresh. His teeth were chattering with the cold, and his dripping form presented a most woe-begone appearance.

“What for did yez lave me behint?” he

demanded of Ben Kittel. "Whin Oi was that dead that Oi could n't spake, Oi was a-callin' on yez an' a-beggin' ov yez to have marcy upon me, and not lave me to the hathen beggars. Yez heard me, of coorse yez heard me! An' there Oi was all the toime, me teeth tryin' to drive ivery other one farther up into me head, an' Oi that wake an' spachless wid the cold that Oi could n't be after whisperin' a word. Yez heard me! Yez know yez heard me."

"Yes, I heard you, Mike, but we could n't stop. It was a dozen men or one, and it was better to lose one than all, for the yawl would have been on us in a minute. Besides, Mike, I did n't have any fear for you. I knew you could take care of yourself and outwit the best crew King George could ever send against you."

"It's true for yez, Oi did that," replied Michael, mollified and elated by the words of praise. "Now Oi'll be after tellin' yez how Oi came it over the beggars. Oi" —

"Hold on, Mike, tell me about it afterwards. Go down below and see if you can't find something dry to put on first." "Now then," Ben Kittel added, turning to his men as he spoke, "we'll cut away this rigging

and strip her of every sail. If we can't get away with the schooner, we'll leave as little aboard of her as possible. Be lively now, lads! Be lively!"

The men responded with a will, and while Michael disappeared below in a search for some dry clothing, they stripped the schooner of such valuables as they had not been able to secure before their hurried departure when she had struck the bar.

The whale-boat was now laden with all that she could safely carry and they were ready to depart, but Michael had not yet put in an appearance.

Running to the hatchway, Tom shouted, — "Come on, Mike. Come on. We're waiting for you. Haven't you found anything to put on? Don't wait any longer if you haven't, for we'll fix you out among us. Don't wait."

"Oi'm comin'," responded Michael, and a moment later the Irishman appeared on deck. Tom gazed at him a moment in astonishment, and then burst into a loud laugh that called his companions to his side. And, indeed, Michael's garb was one to startle his beholders. A brilliant red coat, the garb of an officer, had been found and appropriated by

him; but its original wearer must have been a much smaller man than Michael, for the latter was unable to move in it, so tightly did it fit him. The sleeves hardly came to his wrists, and his shoulders were cramped and drawn. On his head was the broad-brimmed hat of some Quaker, but the only other article he could discover was a sword which he had proudly strapped to his side. His undergarments were still dripping, and from his heavy shoes the water oozed; but Michael, oblivious to all discomfort, his big round face shining with delight under his broad-brimmed hat, his shoulders cramped and squeezed in the brilliant-hued coat, and with the sword swinging at his side, beamed with pleasure as he faced the men.

“It’s Ginerall Cornwallis Oi am, bedad!” he exclaimed, as he began to strut back and forth on the deck before the assembly. “It’s loike him Oi am, for faith! an’ Oi feel too big for me clothes.”

A loud laugh greeted Michael’s sally, and one of the men calling to the others said, “We’ll help you, Mike. We’ll stretch ’em for you;” and before the Irishman could protest they seized the long coat-tails and began to pull in opposite directions. There

was a sound of ripping and tearing cloth, and in a moment the long coat was split from top to bottom.

"That's the way General Washington will serve him," shouted the men, although not one of them then knew that in less than a week from that very time the British commander with his army of eight thousand men would indeed surrender to the American leader at Yorktown.

"We've no time to waste in such foolishness," called Ben Kittel sharply, although he had laughed with his men at the ludicrous sight of Michael with the torn scarlet coat still on his shoulders and the sword clinging to his side.

At his bidding the men resumed their places in the heavily laden whale-boat, and with all fears of further pursuit banished for the time, began to row up the Raritan.

As they approached the camping place they discovered the schooner which Captain Hyler had succeeded in bringing off, lying at anchor near the shore. She was a remarkably well-built, swift-sailing Virginia pilot, and mounted one four-pounder. The elation of Ben Kittel's crew as they beheld the beautiful vessel was almost as great as that of Captain Hyler's

own immediate band, and many were the expressions of delight as the men landed and at once proceeded to unload their own boat.

As soon as that task had been completed they turned to go to the house for their supper, something for which they were all ready now ; but as they came nearer they discovered Captain Hyler and his men standing in a circle, and it was evident that something of unusual interest had been occurring.

As Tom joined the group he perceived two men who were strangers to him standing in the centre of the circle, and at once thought of the two prisoners who had been taken on board the schooner which Captain Hyler had seized. Doubtless these were the very men, and he pressed forward, eager to hear what was being said.

“That is all I want,” Captain Hyler was saying. “Take these men,” he added, turning to his followers, “and shut them up for the night. We’ll all have some supper now.”

The company quickly dispersed, the prisoners following the guard to the place which had been assigned them, and as Tom stood and watched the departing men he felt some one touch him upon the shoulder.

“Why, Captain Huddy, I did n’t know you

were here," he exclaimed, as he beheld the leader of the militia before him. "I have n't seen you in a long time."

"No," replied the captain, "I've been as far from you as you have from me. You've had some pretty stirring experiences since last we met, I hear; but I fancy they'll be as nothing compared with those which Adam Hyler is now preparing. Come with me."

Wondering what his friend meant by his words, Tom obeyed and followed the captain as he led the way down to the shore of the river.

CHAPTER XXIX

COLONEL COWARD AGAIN

“I HAVE heard good things of you, lad,” began Captain Huddy, when he and Tom left the camp behind them. “’T is as I thought, and now that you have entered into the spirit of the struggle, you do not regret that you listened to me, I am sure, and enlisted in the ranks of the defenders of Old Monmouth.”

“No, I am not sorry,” said Tom slowly. “But how is it with you, Captain Huddy? You were wounded, I knew, at the time when you escaped from Colonel Tye’s men down on the shore. Are you all well again?”

“As good as ever I was. For a time I was not able to do much, but I am all right now. Indeed, I am to leave you here and go at once to Toms River. The people there have sent in a petition for me to take command of the blockhouse, and I have neither the power nor inclination to refuse, when both the congress and my neighbors call me.”

“What ever became of Lucretia Emmons?”

I never heard, but I have often wondered. She was a bold and brave girl to help you as she did when Colonel Tye attacked you."

"Lucretia was a brave wench, as you say. She has made her home with the Cobdens since my house was burned. And indeed I would not have left her there alone in any event. She's too good a woman for that."

"And it was you who shot Tye. It seems strange that you should have killed him when he was trying to do the same thing for you."

"'Tis Providence, lad. We have been called to this work not for ourselves, and I have no fears. 'A thousand shall fall at thy side and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.'" Captain Huddy spoke solemnly, and his hearer was not unmoved by the intense conviction of the rugged man before him.

"I have n't been back to Benzeor's house in weeks," Tom said, at last referring to a subject near to his own heart. "I should like to know how it fares with them there."

"Know you not of the doings there?" inquired Captain Huddy, peering keenly at Tom as he spoke.

"I only know that I saw Benzeor's wife and three of the children in a sloop off the

Hook. We were just going to set fire to the vessel when we discovered them on board and gave up the attempt. Do you know why they were there?"

"I knew that she had received word from a British officer in New York to leave her home and come at once to the city, and that she would be amply protected on her way, and after she had arrived there too, for the matter of that. Have you not heard of the man who sent for her?"

"No, I know nothing about it. Who was he?"

"Colonel Coward, I believe."

"What!" exclaimed Tom sharply.

"Yes, it is as I tell you. This Colonel Coward I speak of sent for her, assuring her that her husband was in the city and in desperate need of her presence and aid. There were too many in the household to be cared for on Benzeor's place; for with Little Peter Van Mater's brothers and sisters, they made up quite a large family, and there was no one to provide for their wants but Sarah and her mother. So Benzeor's wife decided to go, and left Sarah to look after the children. 'T was a noble act on Sarah's part to stay and look after the little ones, who really had no claim

upon her. She's as noble a girl as even Lucretia Emmons is."

Tom thought he understood Sarah better than Captain Huddy did, and was satisfied in his mind that the true-hearted girl, while not unmindful of her obligations to Peter's brothers and sisters, had been governed by other motives as well. However, he did not speak, and the captain continued, —

"This Colonel Coward also sent word to Benzeor's wife to bring with her certain trinkets and the dress of a little child who had been saved from a wreck many years ago off the shore. This child was a boy who was bound out to Benzeor Osburn, and who had lived with him ever since he had been rescued until this war began. Since that time I am glad to say that he has been one of the best and bravest of the young patriots in all the country. He is" —

Captain Huddy stopped abruptly and looked keenly at Tom. The lad's face was deathly white, and he was listening to the captain's words with breathless interest.

"There, my lad," resumed Captain Huddy in a lower tone, "I did not mean to excite you so by my little story. I doubt not you are interested, but there is nothing for you to

do now but fight out the battle to the end. You would not let any word I have spoken interfere with your own work now, I am sure."

"No, I shall not stop," said Tom slowly, "but I wish" —

What he wished he did not explain, for abruptly changing his tone he said, —

"Captain Huddy, tell me about Little Peter. I have n't heard a word from or about him, except that he went to New York to see his father."

The captain's face clouded, and for a moment he was silent before he replied.

"Yes, Little Peter did go to New York, but he has not come back."

If Tom had not been so absorbed in the thoughts which the reference to Colonel Coward had aroused, he would have been impressed by the manner of the captain; but as it was he simply said, —

"Doubtless Little Peter has been kept in one of the prisons along with his father. I do not see why he should have gone anyway. He might have known it was a trap for him."

Captain Huddy smiled gravely and said, —

"Now, my boy, I did not know at first

whether I had better tell you of this message of Colonel Coward to Benzeor's wife or not; but I am glad I have, for you have taken it in good part. There is only one thing to do, and that is to keep on as you've begun. The dead must bury their own dead, and brother or sister, father or mother, must not be permitted to interfere with the first duty of every man now, which is to stand as a defender of his country. When the war is ended and peace has come again, it will be time enough then to work up your kindred. Meanwhile make yourself worth finding by them, and I shall myself be glad to assist you in your search after the war."

"If we are here then," said Tom in a low voice.

"Yes, if we are here then," repeated Captain Huddy solemnly. "But that is an issue which rests with the God of battles, not with us. Meanwhile, as I told you, Adam Hyler has some stirring work cut out for his men."

Tom looked up, but did not speak, and the captain went on:—

"I don't mind telling you, Tom, that he and I are planning to work together along the shore, he on the water and I on the land. I'm going down to the blockhouse at Toms

River and shall probably stay there for the winter anyway. Adam thinks the first thing for him to do is to wipe out that nest of vipers at Refugee Town, and he'll do it too."

"When?"

"Very soon now. That's the work of which I was speaking."

"But there are two or three times as many men there as Captain Hyler has all told. I don't see just how he is to do it."

"Numbers make no difference in Captain Hyler's plans. They have n't prevented him from carrying out the work he had to do in the past few weeks, have they?"

"No."

"Well, they won't now. But we've been here long enough and we both want some supper. We'll go back to the camp. Come on, lad."

Together they turned and retraced their way, Tom's heart being in a state of turmoil over the words which Captain Huddy had spoken to him. It was evident that Colonel Coward was seeking for him, Tom thought, and the eager desires of the past few years to learn something of his kindred all came back with redoubled force again. But how could he do anything himself? He was bound by

the double tie of his own promise and desires to stand by Captain Hyler and do his best while in his service. And he would not leave that service if he could. No, the only thing to be done for the present was to keep on, and trust that sometime when the war was ended he might learn something more of the Colonel Coward who was evidently aware of his existence now, and doing something from his side to bring about a meeting.

But would the war ever end? Surely there was no immediate prospect of such an event. Every effort would tell, however, and Tom Coward resolved that he would work as he never had worked before, for there was before him now the dual incentive. Even the desperate attack upon Refugee Town he hailed as a means to that desired end, and when he entered the camp and saw the men seated near the fire eating their supper, he was wishing that Captain Hyler would order the attack to be made on the following day.

A loud laugh from the men broke in upon Tom's meditations, and looking up he perceived Michael standing in front of the fire and facing the assembly. The young Irishman was saying something that evidently was a source of enjoyment to his hearers, and as

Tom came into the group he for the time forgot even his own questions, and laughed as he listened to Michael's words.

"Yis, sir," Michael was saying, "it's true for yez jist as Oi 'm after tellin' yez. Oi jist put me fut down on the sand, an' Oi sez to mesilf, Oi did that, 'Mike Connor, you're a goner for shure if yez don't kape yer head where the beggars can't be afther seein' it at all, at all.' Will, sir, Oi planted me toes on the bottom and tipped me head back in the water" —

"Hold on, Mike," interrupted one of the men; "you say you 'planted' your toes out there in the bay. What did you expect would grow up from them?"

"Corns, bedad!" exclaimed Michael instantly.

"Good for you, Mike!" shouted the laughing men. "Go on with your story. What did you do after you planted your toes on the bottom?"

"Oi was tellin' yez, whin yez broke up me spache. Oi planted me toes an' thin tipped back me head till only me eyes and nose was above the water. Thin Oi sez to mesilf" —

"The 'ayes' and 'noes,' Mike? Which had it?" said one of his hearers.

“The two o’ thim, fur the first thing I knew me head an’ me eyes, an’ nose along wid ’em, started straight fur the bottom, but me futs wint up into the air, an’ Oi ’m thinkin’ the both o’ thim must have acted loike a signal o’ distress, a-wavin’ an’ a-batin’ of the air. Thin up coomes me eyes an’ me nose, an’ down goes me two futs, an’ before Oi jist knew what Oi was a-doin’, Oi was a-workin’ loike the mill whale over by Tinton Falls. It was up an’ thin down Oi’d go, an’ most o’ the toime me futs was where me head ought to have bin, an’ Oi was a-chasin’ me toes up an’ down in the wather, same as yez have been after seein’ a kitten tryin’ to catch up wid his own tail. An’ bedad! Oi almost did it too, but jist whin Oi’d be close up to me futs an’ a-goin’ to grab ’em, so as to make ’em stan’ still an’ behave thimsilves, whist! an’ away they’d go an’ lave me to me game!”

“If the men in the yawl saw you they must have taken you for some nymph or Old Neptune himself sporting in the waves,” said one of his hearers.

“Sportin’, is it? Oi niver had so much sport in all me loife. Oi was that deloighted wid me game that Oi was spacheless pretty soon.”

“Speechless, Mike? Never, as long as the breath of life was in you!”

“That was the trouble. Oi was that excited Oi lost me breath, but Oi filled up wid the wather an’ had to dasist. Thin Oi jist squatted down an’ lifted me hid jist fur enough out for me to brathe, an’ waited for the beggars to come on. Me hat was gone and only me nose an’ eyes could be sane, so Oi was as safe, bedad, as if Oi’d been a bit of sayweed a-floatin’ out wid de tide.”

“How you must have suffered, Mike, when you were speechless!”

Before Michael could reply the men turned and left the place, having finished their meal, and Tom and Captain Huddy approached the fire. The delighted Michael began to attend to their wants, and continued to ramble on about his experiences in the water when he had been abandoned by Ben Kittel. The fact that neither of his hearers appeared to be listening made no difference to the Irishman; his tongue wagged on and the words poured forth as if the supply were inexhaustible, as perhaps it was.

Tom Coward did not linger long among the men in the camp that night, but soon sought his bunk in the hut. But it was long

before sleep came to him. The exciting events of the day, the words of Captain Huddy about Colonel Goward, and the prospect of an attack upon Refugee Town, would not depart from his thoughts. The guards were stationed, and the men turned in for the night; but still Tom thought of his own problems, and endeavored to find some way by which he might continue to serve among Adam Hyler's men and yet be able to learn something of the mysterious colonel who apparently was as eager to learn of him as he himself was of the other. No solution, however, had been found when at last the weary lad's eyes closed, and all things faded from his mind and thoughts.

On the following day Tom learned that Captain Huddy had departed for Toms River before the camp was awake, but not a word was said by any one concerning the proposed attack upon Refugee Town. Indeed, Adam Hyler also left the camp without telling any one where he was going. Day followed day and he did not return. The men practiced daily in the whale-boat, but that was the only break in the routine. Tom began to think that Captain Huddy had been mistaken or that the attack, if planned, had been abandoned.

On the eleventh morning after the capture of the schooner, Captain Hyler unexpectedly appeared in the camp and ordered the men to prepare at once to move upon Refugee Town. He had received word from his scouts that the time for which he had been waiting had come, and with the others Tom Coward at once made ready to join in the expedition, which all unknown to himself was destined to be the pivot on which all his future life turned.

CHAPTER XXX

TO REFUGEE TOWN

THE boat, which was equipped with a small cannon in the bow, led the way, and was followed by several whale-boats, manned much as they had been in the expedition which has already been described. Tom and Michael were in the same boat and seated near together, the Irishman apparently unmindful of all danger, and beaming upon his companions with a face that never seemed to lose its expression of good nature.

The little fleet kept well together, and soon passed down the river and started across the bay, passing close to the stranded schooner which they had abandoned a few days previous to this time, and which, to all appearances, was to be left to its fate.

Keeping well inshore, Captain Hyler at last ordered the men to land when they had arrived at a place about three quarters of a mile from the lighthouse fort, and, after leaving a small detachment to guard the boats, started

with the others across the sandy strip towards the settlement.

The serious nature of the undertaking was now understood by all the band, even Michael himself, who was marching by Tom's side, displaying no disposition to indulge in unnecessary words. At Refugee Town was a force of Tories, outlaws, and desperadoes of all kinds that greatly outnumbered the attacking party, and unless they could be taken by surprise, the outcome of a struggle was more than likely to result in the discomfiture of Adam Hyler's men.

The captain himself was leading the way, and apparently had no feeling of fear. His huge form and shaggy head could be easily discerned above his followers; and when he stopped, as he did occasionally, to peer ahead and listen, and then in his heavy gruff voice spoke a few words to his men, it was readily seen that without him the expedition would at once have been abandoned.

Still they were a sturdy lot of men; and as they made their way across the heavy sand, each man armed with a rifle, they presented an appearance which might not have produced a feeling of entire comfort among the forces at Refugee Town had they then discovered their approach.

Captain Hyler did not underestimate the men whom he was advancing to attack. Of their reckless bravery, he well knew; but his chief reliance for success was upon the lack of leaders among them. They were dangerous when some of the redcoats came down from New York and led them on a plundering expedition, but otherwise they were not likely to stand long against a concerted attack, or so Adam Hyler fondly thought.

When he had approached within a quarter of a mile of the place, the captain once more halted his men and gave his final directions for the attack. Three divisions were made of his forces, one of which he was himself to lead against the town from the south; Ben Kittel was to lead a second division and fall upon the place on the north, while a third division was to be held in reserve and advance to the attack after the other two had made their presence known. In this manner Adam Hyler thought to take his enemies by surprise and, by the suddenness of his attack, and by creating the impression that the town was completely surrounded by his men, throw the refugees into confusion, and accomplish by his strategy what he feared could not otherwise be done without a heavy loss.

The arrangements were soon made ; Captain Hyler led his men to the south, while Ben Kittel departed for the northern side, and the third division, in which were Tom and Michael, advanced a little nearer the shore, and then threw themselves upon the sand, and waited for the others to begin the attack.

On the rise of ground before them they could see the lighthouse fort ; but as yet not a man had been discovered near the place. This seemed very strange to Tom, whose recollection at the time was of the many desperate men who thronged the town, and who at this hour of the day were usually to be seen in numbers moving about the shore ; and now not one could be seen. It was indeed strange, and the excited lad began to fear that their approach had been discovered, and that they themselves were to be the victims of some plot.

He lifted his head and looked behind him, but he could see nothing to relieve the monotonous stretch of the sand and the distant waters of the bay and the ocean. Not even a sail was within sight. There was nothing to be done except to await the actions of Captain Hyler, and the young soldier strove to possess his soul in patience.

Neither of the bands could now be seen by him, as the intervening dunes shut out the sight of the beach. The slow moments passed, and still the silence was unbroken. The sun climbed higher in the heavens, the ceaseless roll of the breakers thundered in the distance, but the men lying prostrate on the sand had not moved from their position. Tom was beginning to fear that Captain Hyler had failed. Perhaps he even had been captured; but still not a gun had been discharged, and he knew that Adam Hyler would not give up without a desperate resistance.

Suddenly the sounds of shots and shouts in the distance were heard. The men instantly roused themselves, and, crouching low, were ready to start forward at the call of their leader. Again shots were heard, this time from the northern side of the town, and doubtless were fired by Ben Kittel's men.

Tom was as eager to advance now as any of his companions, and gazed at the leader, wondering why they were not ordered to go to the assistance of their friends; still the word was not given, and as they waited breathlessly not a shot nor a sound saluted their ears. The uncertainty was becoming almost unbearable, and perceiving the restlessness of

his men, the leader at last gave the word, the band sprang to their feet, and, looking hastily to the locks of their guns, seized their weapons, and began to run swiftly forward.

As soon as they had gained the summit of the dune, they stopped a moment and gazed in astonishment at the scene before them. Adam Hyler's men could be seen advancing rapidly toward the town, and before them were running a half dozen men. These were unarmed, and that fact gave them a slight advantage over their pursuers. It was evident that they were gaining upon them in their flight. If they could once regain the town and enter the lighthouse fort, they would be safe. Realizing this, they were putting forth every effort, and running with a speed that threatened to distance the men behind them. They were yet too far away for the band in which Tom and Michael were to shoot, and, eager as they were, they stopped a moment to watch the desperate race before them.

Just then Ben Kittel's men were seen to be approaching. They had run straight towards the town, and, unmolested, had kept on through it, and now were just emerging and advancing quickly toward the fleeing men.

The fugitives, confronted by the new danger, stopped for a moment, and then, changing their direction, started swiftly towards the place where Tom and his companions were waiting, evidently not having as yet discovered their presence.

“Spread out, men, and take after them,” called Tom’s leader sharply; and instantly the men obeyed, still grasping their guns and scattering until almost in the form of a semi-circle they were running as if to meet the oncoming fugitives.

Threatened by the new danger, the men stopped for a moment, and then, instantly scattering, renewed their flight, determined to take the desperate chance of passing through the line before them. Beset as they were by enemies on three sides, and with the ocean in their rear, it was the only hope of escape that remained to the fleeing refugees; and, hopeless as the venture was, they did not hesitate, but with increased speed came running toward Tom’s division.

The leader shouted for the running men to stop, but he might as well have bidden the waves on the beach to roll backward. On and on they came, never once stopping now, and it began to look as if a part of them

at least would succeed in escaping. Suddenly Tom heard several guns discharged by his companions, and perceived that two of the men had fallen, but they instantly rose again and endeavored to continue their flight.

No two of them were running together now, and Tom soon perceived that he and Michael were separated from their friends, and both were running after the same man. The fugitive was a hundred and fifty yards in advance of them, and going at a pace which threatened to place a still greater distance between him and his pursuers.

Slowly and steadily Michael drew ahead of Tom, and was even beginning to gain slightly upon the man before him. He had thrown aside his gun, and with long and awkward leaps was plunging forward in a manner which at another time would have made Tom laugh at his efforts; but he had neither the breath nor the disposition to indulge in merriment at the Irishman's expense then.

Shutting his teeth firmly together, he followed Michael's example, threw his own gun upon the sand, and strove desperately to increase his speed; but with all his efforts he could see that both Michael and the fleeing man were gaining steadily upon him, although

it seemed to him that his friend was diminishing the distance between him and the fugitive.

All thoughts of his companions or of what was occurring behind him were forgotten now in his desperate zeal to keep up with the men before him.

Exerting himself as he was, Tom nevertheless watched the race almost as if it were a contest in which he himself was not engaged. On and on sped the men, and steadily the sturdy Michael gained upon the man before him. Tom longed for the gun he had discarded, and thought how easily he could end the contest. One thing was certain, at all events, and that was if the present race continued much longer he would be compelled to drop out of it, for, strong as he was, his breath was almost gone, and even now his pace began to slacken.

Michael and the fleeing man, however, showed no signs of giving up the contest. With apparently unabated speed they kept on, but the distance between them was now not more than twenty yards, and even that was rapidly disappearing. The man in advance was plainly faltering, and with a strong burst of speed the Irishman darted ahead,

and was within a rod of his victim, when the latter suddenly stopped, and with a quick movement dropped directly before Michael.

Perceiving the action, Michael endeavored to fall upon the prostrate man; but he had "reckoned without his host," as the people of Old Monmouth were wont to express it, for with a sudden movement the man tripped the Irishman, and, as he fell to the ground, held him in his grasp and threw himself upon him.

Tom could see all this; and, instantly forgetting his own breathless condition, he renewed his efforts, and began to run swiftly toward the struggling men. As he came nearer, he could see that the man was striving desperately now to free himself from Michael's clutches. The Irishman had succeeded in grasping him by the hair, and, unmindful of the blows which were rained upon him, still hung on.

Over and over upon the sand rolled the men, and, as Tom came nearer, at first he could not discover which was having the advantage in the struggle. Without waiting to solve the problem, he threw himself upon the contestants and strove to separate them. At last he succeeded in grasping the refugee by the neck, and compelled him to desist.

“Get up, Mike! Get up!” he gasped in his excitement. “Get up and help me. I’ve got him now. Get up! Get up!”

“Faith! An’ Oi hope yez know yez have,” said Michael, as he let go of the man’s hair and rose.

The moment he felt himself free from Michael’s grasp, the desperate man began to try to protect himself against his fresh assailant; but the Irishman instantly threw himself again into the contest and continued the struggle.

“Hold him, Mike!” gasped Tom, as he freed himself for a moment; and then taking his neckerchief, after a desperate struggle, with Michael’s aid, succeeded in tying their prisoner’s hands behind his back.

Then taking him by the shoulders they lifted their prostrate prisoner to his feet, and, breathless from their exertions, looked into his face.

“You’re Ichabod Johnson!” exclaimed Tom in astonishment, as he perceived who the man was. “Mike, that’s the best day’s work you ever did in your life. There’s a reward of twenty-five pounds for the capture of this fellow. And we’ve got him! We’ve got him!”

“Twenty-foive poun’s, is it?” replied Michael. “Indade, an’ Oi’m thinkin’ it’s two hundred poun’s we’ll be havin’ if we weighed the beggar. He’s that heavy that Oi thought a ton had dropped on me. Twinty-foive! Go away wid yez!”

“I know who you are,” interrupted the prisoner quickly. “You’re young Coward. Now you let me go and I’ll make it worth more than twenty-five pounds for you.”

Tom smiled as he said, “Come on! We’ll go back and join the men. Come on!”

“But I mean it. I mean it,” persisted Ichabod earnestly.

“Come on,” was Tom’s only reply, as he pushed the man before him.

“Look here,” said Ichabod eagerly. “Suppose I should tell you that there is a man right here in Old Monmouth who would give you double that reward? Suppose I told you he was one of your own family? I know right where he is now. He’s willing to pay me fifty — yes, a hundred — pounds to get you, and you wouldn’t be in the least danger. What do you care for Adam Hyler when it’s some of your own family I’m telling you about? And I can take you to him in less than two hours!”

“Who is it?” said Tom in a low voice.

“It’s Colonel Coward. It’s some one worth seeing, let me tell you. Now there isn’t a man in Refugee Town except the half dozen of us you’re all chasing. None of Adam’s men can see you. Come with me and I’ll take you straight to this man, and no one will ever know a word about it; or if you won’t do that, let me go on and I’ll fix up a meeting between you. Do it! Do it!” he added eagerly.

For a moment Tom hesitated. He did not doubt that Ichabod was speaking the truth. The man’s eagerness convinced him of that; and all the longings of his heart might be gratified now, and it was as the man said, — no one would be the wiser. He glanced up and could not discover any of his recent companions within sight. Michael’s face revealed his confusion, but Tom knew he would not betray him. Indeed, he felt sure that at a word from him Michael would even consent to go with him to see this Colonel Coward, of whom Ichabod had just been speaking.

The struggle in his mind was a desperate one. It was true that he had come to feel a strong desire to help in the defense of Old Monmouth, but what was that compared with

the possibility of solving the secret of his own life? And it could be done so easily now.

Ichabod, perceiving the effect of his own words, renewed his pleadings. He promised, he begged, he pleaded; and Tom listened silently and with a longing which could not find expression in words.

Suddenly his manner changed, his hesitancy disappeared, and, turning to Michael, he said quietly, "Keep hold of his arm on that side, Mike, and we'll go back and join the men."

"Never!" exclaimed Ichabod, as with a sudden wrench he tore himself free from his captors and, with his hands still bound behind his back, started swiftly along the beach.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE ADVANCE OF THE BRITISH

ICHABOD JOHNSON'S sudden movement had taken his captors by surprise, and before they could recover from their confusion the fleeing man had gained a good start.

Instantly Tom and Michael started in pursuit, but the renewed prospect of escape seemed to provide the desperate man with increased power; and as the three sped on along the beach, it soon became evident that Ichabod was gaining upon both of his pursuers. Steadily he increased the distance between him and them, apparently unmindful of his awkwardness, and, disregarding his inability to use his hands or arms, he darted forward with ever-increasing speed, and as soon as he had come to the place where the low trees and bushes were growing, changed his course, and soon was lost to sight.

For a time Tom and Michael searched for their recent prisoner, but all in vain; and at last, crestfallen and chagrined, they turned

and retraced their way to the place where they had left their companions.

Captain Hyler and his men had searched Refugee Town thoroughly, but nothing of any value had been discovered. From their prisoners they learned that all except the few men who had been taken had gone on a plundering expedition into the interior of the county, led by men from the British forces in New York, and that it was uncertain when they would return.

At last Captain Hyler decided to go back to their camp on the Raritan and take their few prisoners with him ; and just as the men were starting Tom and Michael appeared upon the scene, the latter with his face beaming, as if success or failure were both alike to him, but Tom could not conceal his feeling of chagrin.

"What is it, lad?" said Captain Hyler. "Did n't you get your man?"

"We did that," said Michael quickly, before Tom could reply.

"Where is he then? I don't see any one with you."

"Oi brought some o' his hair as a kapesake," said Michael, plucking from his coat some of the locks of Ichabod's hair, which showed

that his grasp upon the prisoner had been no gentle one.

“What do you mean? Have you killed him? Where is your man?”

“Bedad, an’ Oi wish Oi could tell yez. First he had me, thin Oi had him, thin we both of us had him, thin he left us that sudden that Oi could n’t be after sinding back to him me handful o’ his hair.”

Captain Hyler clearly showed that he did not understand Michael’s words, and then Tom briefly related the story of their capture of Ichabod, and of his escape.

“’Tis a pity, lad, that he got away, but you’re not the only ones who have had the same experience. Ichabod Johnson’s a slippery fellow, and I think the congress is all safe enough in offering the reward they have for him, dead or alive. He is n’t a fighter, but he is a hard one to get hold of. Where are your guns, boys?”

“We threw them away when we were chasing him,” said Tom, for the first time recalled to the loss by the captain’s words. “They must be over here on the beach.”

“Never throw away your guns, whatever happens,” said the captain sternly. “Now go and look them up and come straight to

the place where the boats are. We've no time to waste now. Be lively, lads!"

Tom and Michael left their companions and ran again toward the beach, where they thought they had left the guns, and were fortunate enough to discover both soon, and then rejoined their comrades on the shore. The six prisoners who had been taken were placed on board, and then the entire band began to row back to their camp, where they arrived about the middle of the afternoon.

The expedition had not been a complete failure in spite of the fact that so few men had been found in Refugee Town, for a half dozen prisoners had been secured, and the effects of the visit would not be altogether lost. Ichabod Johnson had escaped, and the reports he would spread abroad among his comrades-in-arms would serve to let the Tories and refugees know that Adam Hyler was not content only with the seizure of the vessels anchored off the shore, but that he could also lead an expedition against the land forces when the occasion required. His men were correspondingly elated, and there was great rejoicing in the camp that night.

But Tom Coward did not join in the celebration. Apart from his friends, he was

thinking over the experiences of the day, and once more a struggle was going on in his own mind. He was convinced that Ichabod had spoken truly, and that this Colonel Coward, of whom he had heard so much, was in reality as desirous of seeing him as he was of finding the colonel; and Ichabod had said that he was now in the county, and was even willing to pay a large reward for the discovery of himself.

Tom thought of Benzeor's wife and children, and now understood the meaning of their presence on the sloop off the Hook. It was like Benzeor to send for them, and not unlike his wife to yield. She was an overworked, spiritless, discouraged little woman, and doubtless would be rejoiced to leave the region which in late years had been filled with terrors. But Sarah had not gone, or at least she had not been with her mother and children on board the sloop, and Captain Huddy had also said she had remained at Little Peter's home. Tom longed to go and assist her in her labors, but Captain Hyler would never consent to his leaving camp now, even for a few days, he well knew.

Why should he not leave it altogether? If this Colonel Coward was as desirous of

seeing him as Ichabod had declared him to be, why should he not seek him out? And if he should prove to be a relative and possessed of influence, as Tom somehow felt convinced he was, under his protection he would find a relief from the hardships and struggles through which he had been passing for the past few years.

The temptation was a severe one. Forlorn and homeless as far back as he could remember, the prospect of now finding a friend and protector was so inviting that Tom's heart almost gave way. He was heartily sick of the war, and longed for the time to come when he might do something which would be more in accord with his own desires. But the war was here, there could be no denial of that fact; and there were only two paths open for him: one was to withdraw and quickly seek out the man who was searching for him, and perhaps find a life which would be easier and more in the line of his own desires; the other was to continue in the service and fight on till the end came, if there ever should be an end, which sometimes he was much inclined to doubt. The struggle had lasted for years now, and instead of growing better everything in Old Monmouth had

gone steadily on from bad to worse. His sympathies were all with the struggling colonies; he did not attempt to disguise that fact; but was he called upon to sacrifice all his young manhood days? Surely his life had not been a pleasant one thus far. He had never known what it was to have a father or mother, and from early morning until nightfall he had been compelled to labor for the avaricious Benzeor. And now there was a prospect that he might escape all the hardships, and perhaps — for Tom hardly dared to express the hope even to himself — he might even find one who was a member of his own family.

The troubled lad thought long over his perplexing problem, drawn now in one direction and now in another. Suddenly the thought of Captain Huddy occurred to him. It almost seemed as if he could hear the voice of the stern old warrior as he declared that father nor mother, brother nor sister, should be allowed to stand in the way of duty, and that even the dead should be left to bury their dead, if need be, in a time like the present. Then he thought of Adam Hyler, and his rugged zeal for the cause of his country, when he knew that he was in constant peril

of his life, for the British had declared he was a deserter and should be hanged without ceremony as soon as he was taken; and among Adam Hyler's men were many as self-sacrificing and earnest as he. Indeed, the most of them had families, and doubtless cared for them as much as he himself for his unknown kindred; and he had given his promise too, and that ought to be worth something. No; he could not leave the camp. His name was Coward, but he would show that he could be brave, and that he could do right because it was right to do right, whatever he was called by the people who knew him.

The struggle was ended, and Tom returned to the camp and joined the group in front of the camp-fire. In his heart there was a feeling of rejoicing that he had not yielded, but that did not mean he still did not fully appreciate the difficulties with which he was beset. He had given up all thoughts of regaining his own kindred or even of learning who and what he was, and before him was only the dreary prospect of continual struggles and the ever-present danger of death.

He could not help wondering whether any of the men before him had given up as much

as he for the sake of Old Monmouth and his sadly beset country. He was ashamed of the thought a moment later, as he looked about him and realized that many of the men before him were fathers who had left defenseless children in their homes, some were young men who had kissed their mothers when they had left home, never knowing whether they were to see them again, and others were brothers whose sisters had bidden them go; and, though they had not shed a tear at the time of parting, had afterwards almost given way to their agony of fear at being left to the tender mercies of the desperadoes who ravaged the country in the absence of the natural protectors of the homes.

Tom endeavored resolutely to put behind him all thoughts of his own personal losses, and do with his might whatsoever his hands found to do in the present crisis; and abundance of work was soon found. Captain Hyler acted almost like one beside himself. He took but little rest, and spared his men no more than he did himself. Up and down the coast and along the banks of the Raritan he stationed his men, and they were working by night and by day.

He sent an expedition even into the Nar-

rows, and captured a ship there laden with rum and pork, and took fourteen prisoners, but was compelled to set fire to the vessel before he could get her into the safety of the bay.

He captured two sloops, which had been sent down to the Shrewsbury to secure provisions for the army in New York, and on board of one was so fortunate as to find six hundred pounds in specie, which we may be sure the needy patriots put to good use. He seemed to be "always everywhere;" and as a natural result of his exploits, in the most of which Tom Coward had a part, the British in New York at last became thoroughly aroused, and were determined to put an end to his deeds, which were so sadly demoralizing to the Tories, and creating such havoc among their trading vessels.

Rumors of these intended deeds were for some time current among Captain Hyler's men, but the days passed, and still nothing was done, and they began to think that the reports were all without foundation. It was now midwinter, and the cold and ice had somewhat interfered with Captain Hyler's movements. He still maintained a careful watch, however, and his men, with their long

whale-boats, were stationed along the shore from Toms River to the mouth of the Raritan, although he had withdrawn the most of his followers to Brunswick, where they were working upon some new boats.

Guards along the river at various intervals were stationed by the careful leader, and long before it was light one morning Tom stepped into a little skiff which was fast to the dock and prepared to row about ten miles down the river to relieve the guard there, and take his place for the day.

There had been a heavy rain, and the ice had been carried down the stream by the freshet. It was easy rowing, for the current was strong, and as he passed he could see the shores in the dim light. He had no thought of immediate danger, his mind being taken up with the dreary duty which awaited him; for he was to remain at the post to which he had been assigned until after midday, when some one would come and relieve him, just as now he himself was going to the relief of another.

He had gone about a half mile below the town and the gray of the dawn had appeared in the east. There was little comfort in the thought, however, for the air was cold, and

there were signs that the rain was not entirely gone.

Suddenly he stopped, as he thought he heard the sound of boats before him. He was just turning one of the numerous bends in the little river, and resting upon his oars he waited to see who it was coming, thinking perhaps the guard had become impatient and had not waited for his arrival, before he started for the town.

To his surprise he discovered several boats coming up the stream. Yes, he could see six of them, and they were all filled with men, too. So startled had he been by the unexpected sight that he did not realize how swiftly the current was bearing him directly towards the approaching boats, but he was speedily recalled when a sharp hail came from the boat in advance.

Instantly Tom thought of the rumor that the British were to attack the town, and doubtless this was a part of the expedition itself. Without replying to the summons he turned his light skiff about and prepared to return to Brunswick and give warning.

The hail was repeated, but again Tom did not reply; and then almost before he was aware of what was happening one of the

men in the foremost boat raised his gun and fired.

The lad was almost thrown from his seat, and instantly knew he had been hit; but in sheer desperation he grasped his oars again and began to pull with all his strength. The river roared, the banks seemed to rise and fall like the waves of the sea, but still he struggled on. The roaring in his ears became louder, and strange lights danced before his eyes, but not for a moment did he cease his efforts. On and on, at times not realizing what he was doing, he sent the skiff, and at last saw before him the low dock from which he had so recently departed, and some of his own companions standing near.

With a last desperate effort he sent the little boat close in, and managing somehow to crawl up on the dock, called out, —

“The British are coming! The British are coming!”

Then the roaring in his ears drowned all other sounds, the blackness became blacker still, and the wounded lad fell forward.

When he regained consciousness he found himself lying in a bed in a strange room. He could see that other beds were there and that men were in them also. Then it seemed to

him that a face very like Michael's bent over him, and in the fear that it would go before he could speak, he quickly whispered, —

“Is that you, Mike?”

“Faith! an' it is that! Yez be all roight now. 'T was a close call for yez, Tom Coward, Oi'm after thinkin'.”

As Michael spoke, the man in the bed next to Tom's suddenly raised himself upon his elbow, and looking earnestly toward Tom said, —

“Is your name Coward?”

“Yis,” said Michael, speaking quickly for his friend. “His name may be Coward; but, bedad! he is n't any, Oi'm tellin' yez.”

“My name is Coward too,” said the man quietly.

Tom eagerly turned himself in the bed and looked at the stranger. For a moment neither spoke, and even the loquacious Michael kept silence. Tom felt that his long suspense was ended, and that now in a way of which he had not dreamed the question of his life was about to be answered.

CHAPTER XXXII

CONCLUSION

"ARE you the young man who lived with Benzeor Osburn?" said the stranger at last, breaking in upon the awkward silence and peering intently at Tom as he spoke.

"Yes," replied Tom quietly, "I lived with him until I went into the militia" —

"Then you are the one I've been searching for all these months. Do you know who I am?"

"No, — that is, I don't know unless you are Colonel Coward."

"That's who I am, though I don't know how you learned my name. Now I'm wondering whether you know how we two are related to each other."

"No, I don't know," said Tom quietly, though his heart was throbbing violently in his excitement.

"Listen, then, and I'll tell you a story. Many years ago, it must have been fifteen or sixteen at least, there was a young officer in

England named John Coward. He was of a good family, and had a commission in the king's service; but proud as he was of that, he had a still greater pride in his young wife and little son, who was as bright a lad as one often finds. I mind him now as he used to run about the house, strutting around with a cane for a horse and playing that he was a soldier like his father. It was a happy home, and not a cloud seemed to rest upon the lives of any of his household.

"The first break came when the young officer was ordered to the colonies. His wife at first insisted upon coming too, but it was finally decided that she and the lad should remain in England for a time, until it should be decided whether he was likely to stay long in America or not. After a year had passed, word came for the young wife to come and bring the boy, and join her husband. I shall never forget the eagerness with which she prepared to sail. I think I have never seen such happiness as she manifested, since that sad day, for I was there to assist her in packing up her possessions."

"You were there with her?" inquired Tom.

"Yes, I was there, and I stayed with her

till she and the little fellow set sail on the schooner, 'The Queen.' I stood on the dock and watched her as long as she could be seen. Mistress Coward and the little lad waved their hands at me till at last the dock must have disappeared from their sight as the schooner had from mine, and from that day until the present I have not seen either of them.

"As the months passed, at last we received word that 'The Queen' had been wrecked off the Monmouth shore, and that all on board had perished. It was a terrible blow to the friends in England, and we waited for some message from the young officer, but not a word came. I, too, waited until I could bear the suspense no longer, and then I took passage for the new world. But after I arrived here I almost wished I had not come, for the news I received after I landed was even worse than that which I had had in England."

For a moment the speaker paused, and the silence in the room was most intense. Tom was breathing rapidly in his excitement, and the round face of Michael betrayed his interest in the story.

"What was it you heard?" said Tom softly.

“The young officer had been sent on an expedition against the Indians; but he never came back, though his men carried his lifeless body with them for miles through the forest and at last buried it in New York with all the honors of war. But all their empty honors could not give me back my only brother. He was younger than I, and as we were the only surviving members of our family we had naturally turned to each other, and I doubt me whether any two brothers in all this world ever loved as did John and I.

“You can readily see that I had no heart to go back to merry England after that, for the merriment and life were alike dead to me there, and so I have remained ever since in the colonies in the service of my king. To me it seemed as if that was all that was left me, for my brother and his wife and the brave little lad, named for me ‘Thomas,’ were all gone, and I had neither chick nor child of my own. The old wound seared over, but there was a dull ache in my heart all the time.

“So it continued until a little more than a year ago, when I chanced to meet a man in New York by the name of Edwards. It seems he had once lived in Old Monmouth, and his son had been hanged by the reb—

by the people there. Somehow we got to talking about our common losses, and in the course of our conversation it came out that years ago a lad of my name had been rescued from a sinking schooner off the shore, and that he had been living for years as the bound boy of a man named Benzeor Osburn. At first I did n't think very much about the matter, but the impression gradually strengthened in my heart that this might be something of interest to me, especially after I had learned that this man Osburn had left his home and was staying in New York. Finally I went and searched him out and had a long conversation with him, and the result was that I was convinced that the boy he had received into his home was none other than my own little namesake, the son of my younger brother John. To make matters doubly sure, however, I insisted upon seeing the trinkets and clothing which Osburn said the child had worn when he was rescued from the wreck, and which Osburn also said he had preserved in his own home.

“How to obtain them then became the question. I had frequently been down into Old Monmouth on expeditions for supplies, and had some dealings with a mulatto there they

called Colonel Tye, though I believe his real name was Titus, and also with some other men. From them I also had heard the story, but of late I had not been often into the old county.

“Finally the matter was settled by Benzeor Osburn sending for his wife and children, I having promised to provide for them liberally in New York, and they were to bring the clothes and trinkets to which I have already referred. Well, they came and brought the things with them, and I found a little ring and some ornaments of gold which I at once recognized as those which I had given the little Tom Coward when he was a baby in England, and we were hoping would some day become a loyal subject of his Majesty King George III. But all these things were as nothing compared with the joy I felt in having discovered my younger brother’s boy, for it was almost like the dead coming to life again. Of course I had n’t seen him then, and I went down into Old Monmouth myself, but the lad was gone and was in the service of the colonies in their revolt against their king.

“I had no opportunity to push my search any farther, though a man named Ichabod

Johnson assured me that he could bring my nephew to me; for just then there was an attack planned upon a certain Adam Hyler and his men, who were a constant source of trouble to the forces in the city. This attack, as you may know, was to be made on land and water. Some of the men from the fortieth and fifty-second regiments were to move by land, and some by boats up the Raritan, and of course I was under obligations to serve with my own brave fellows. Perhaps you know that we landed all right and burned some of this man Hyler's boats; but the rebel militia rallied and we were compelled to retreat, after a few of our men had been killed and wounded, and we had taken a half dozen or so of the rebels and wounded a few more. I myself was so unfortunate as to be wounded in the right foot, but whether it will permanently disable me or not I cannot say. Perhaps I shall not regret it, since it has made me a companion of my own nephew."

For a long time Tom did not speak. His wound had been a flesh one, and though he had suffered from weakness he already had been informed by Michael that he was in no danger. The story to which he had just listened thrilled him, and in his happiness he

almost forgot his suffering and his present condition. Then for a long time the two wounded men talked together, the one asking question after question, and the other answering and explaining all he knew.

"It's a relief," said Tom at last, "to know I'm not alone in the world, anyway. I knew my name was Coward, but I did n't know whether there was any one else unfortunate enough to share it with me or not."

"You need n't be ashamed of your name," said his uncle quickly. "It's only a modified form of the old Saxon word Cow-herd, and I'm proud to trace our lineage back to those sturdy men. We have every right to feel proud of them, and not ashamed of the name itself either."

Tom did not feel quite so positive about that fact, but he did not linger upon it, as his heart was troubled by another and far more perplexing matter. He had discovered his uncle, it was true, but he was an officer in the king's service, while he himself was enrolled among the despised "rebels," who were defending Old Monmouth from the attacks of her enemies. He could not abandon the men who had been his comrades, nor could he expect that his uncle would leave the service

to which he belonged. They had been united only to be separated again, he feared, and the prospect was anything but an agreeable one.

At last he said, "We know we have found each other, but I'm afraid it will not do us much good."

"Why not?" inquired his uncle abruptly. "Don't you like your new relatives?"

"It is n't that, but you are among the king's men, and I'm on the other side, and I don't see how I can leave it" —

"No one expected you to, you young rebel," replied his uncle lightly. "It's a shame for you to be fighting against your king" —

"I don't know that it's any more of a shame than it is for the king to be fighting us," interrupted Tom quickly. "We're defending ourselves, that's all we're doing."

"You would n't be a Coward if you did n't stick to your own opinion," laughed his uncle. "I've thought of all that, and did n't expect anything different. But I'm thinking, lad, the war won't last much longer, and there'll be nothing then to separate us."

"Won't last much longer!" exclaimed Tom eagerly. "What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. Since Cornwallis has

surrendered it seems to be the opinion of all, as far as I can make it out, that the end has almost come."

"Cornwallis surrendered!" said Tom almost with a shout. "Is it so? Is it true?"

"Yes, it is true; too true, I fear. He surrendered with all his eight thousand men to your man Washington last October. An expedition of seven thousand had been sent from New York to his aid, but as soon as they heard of the surrender they turned back; and now everybody thinks the king will not push the struggle any farther. We'll have to let this matter of ours rest for a time, lad. I'll be exchanged, and you'll stay among your friends till we know just what the outcome of it all is to be, and then we'll get together and we'll stay together, too, forever."

Colonel Coward's words proved to be true. In a brief time he was exchanged and sent to New York. He bade his young kinsman a tender farewell, assuring him that they would soon meet again, and, after making special provisions for Tom's wants, departed for his comrades in New York.

As Tom improved in health, a great longing seized upon him to return to Old Monmouth and see Sarah once more, that is, if

she was still in the famous old county. As he was not yet fit for service, his request was readily granted, and Tom, accompanied by the faithful Michael, returned to his old home for a time.

The ruins of Benzeor's house impressed him deeply, and it was with a heavy heart he turned to Little Peter's former home, where he had heard that Sarah was now. But he discovered that she, with Little Peter's brothers and sisters, had been received into Jacob Vannote's household, and there Tom found her.

Of the welcome he received and the care bestowed upon him until he was nursed back to health, we cannot here write. There was a deep happiness in Tom's heart. He had found his relative, or been found of him, he did not just know which, but he was satisfied with the event, whatever the method may have been. The only matter that troubled him now was the report concerning Little Peter. It was commonly said that he had gone to the city to search for his father, but had been confined with him in the old sugar-house prison, and now it was also reported that both had died of the fever. Sarah steadily refused to believe the report, but the

fear was never absent from Tom Coward's heart.

It was true that Cornwallis had surrendered and that the armies had outwardly at least suspended hostilities, but that did not mean that peace had come to the people of Old Monmouth. Indeed, at no period during the entire war were such deeds wrought in her midst as those which were done in the time between the surrender of Cornwallis and the signing of the treaty of peace in 1783. It almost seemed as if Tories and Whigs had rallied for a last desperate attack upon each other.

The pine-robbers' dastardly deeds increased in number and violence, and it was long before Old Monmouth was rid of Ichabod Johnson and Giberson and Bacon and Davenport, and others as evil as they. How the famous old county at last succeeded in obtaining peace is not a legitimate part of this present story.

Adam Hyler and his men continued their efforts, and with a marvelous degree of success. Of Captain Huddy and his brave deeds, and of the fearful fate which finally befell him, we cannot here write, nor can we tell of the action of Congress for the brave Captain

Hyler, nor of the part the noble Washington himself took in the exciting events which centred about Captain Huddy; for the limits of this story have been reached.

It was long before Tom Coward found the peaceful life which he desired. He was no longer a boy, but a young man, and "of age" now, and could not shrink from the responsibilities which came upon him as they did upon others of the Monmouth men. Nor was he one who desired to avoid them.

To him, terrible though the struggle had been, it had brought a result different from that which had come to any of his neighbors. They had to tell of the losses of brother or father, of burned homes and ruined possessions. To him, while the war had deprived him of the only home he had ever known, it had also restored to him the only relative he had in all the world.

It had done more, however, than show him who he was, for it had also taught him what he was. In facing the struggle, in doing his duties, he had gained a certain ruggedness of character, which after all is the basis of all true manhood. This, however, is something which the piping times of peace can also give; for right is right and wrong is wrong in

whatever form it may present itself, and how to "quit one's self like a man" is the problem of life which needs to be solved to-day as much as it did in the far-away days of the struggle in Old Monmouth.

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